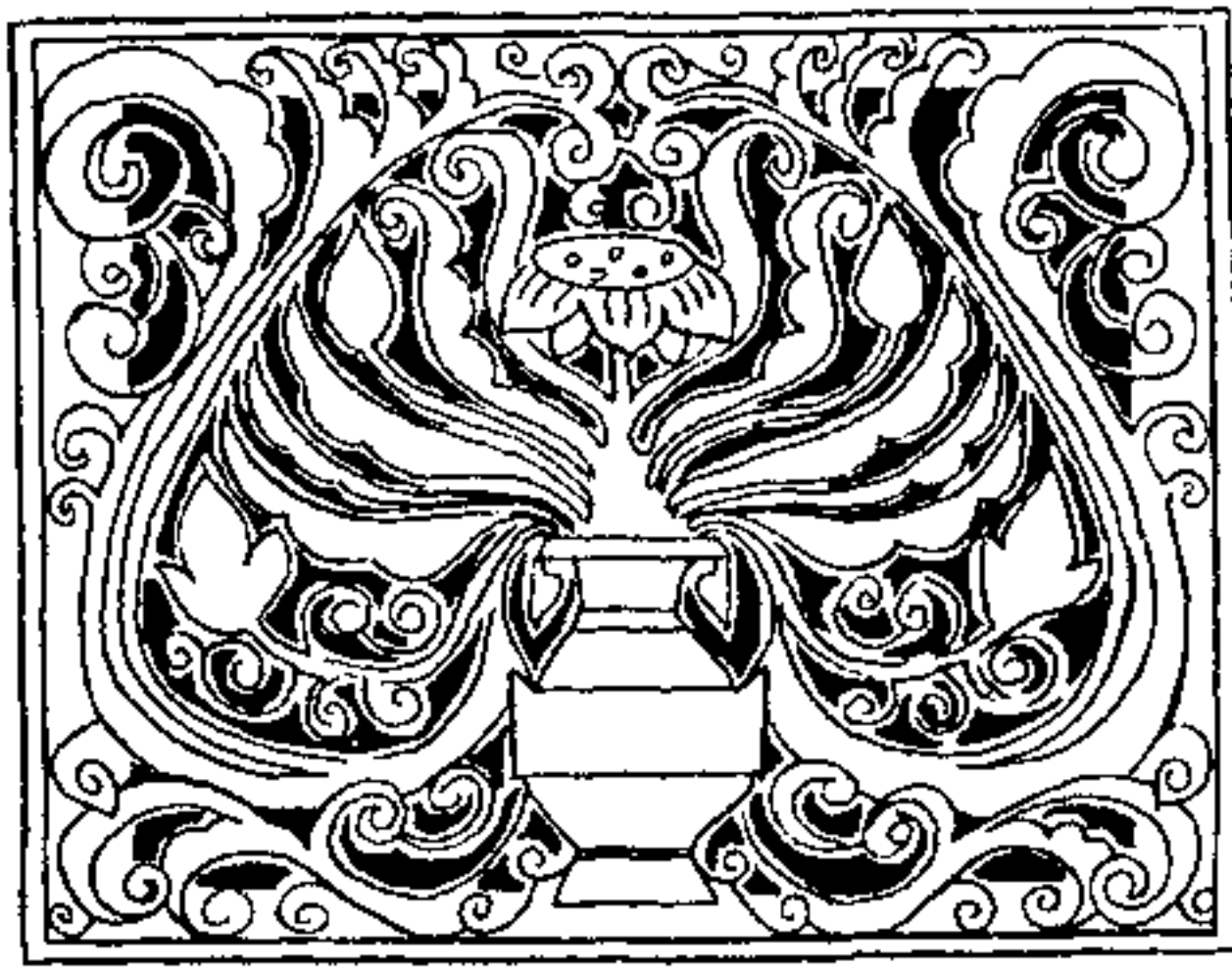




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Cover: A view of the Himalayas

MARCH 2000

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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 105

MARCH 2000

No. 3

VEDIC PRAYERS

चित्रं देवानामुदगादनीकं
चक्षुर्मित्रस्य वरुणस्याग्नेः।
आप्रा द्यावापृथिवी अन्तरिक्षं
सूर्य आत्मा जगतस्तस्थुषश्च॥
—Rg Veda, 1.115.1

तत्सूर्यस्य देवत्वं तन्महत्त्वं
मध्या कर्तोर्विततं सं जभार।
यदेदयुक्त हरितः सधस्थादा-
द्रात्री वासस्तनुते सिमस्मै॥
—Rg Veda, 1.115.4

अद्या देवा उदिता सूर्यस्य
निरंहसः पिपृता निरवद्यात्।
तन्नो मित्रो वरुणो मामहन्ता-
मदितिः सिन्धुः पृथिवी उत द्यौः॥
—Rg Veda, 1.115.6

The brilliant sun has risen! His dazzling rays appear wonderful! He is like eyes to Mitra, Varuṇa, and Agni; ie, to the whole creation. Having arisen, the resplendent sun fills this world, the higher ones, and space with dazzling light. This sun who is the inner controller of all the worlds is the Self and inspirer of both living beings (*jagat*) and non-living (*tasthuṣa*) things.

The divinity (*devatvam*) of the inspirer of everything (*sūrya*) and his greatness are not revealed all the time. He retrieves his rays even before the works of human beings is complete. When he unharnesses the horses (which are called *harit*, meaning the drawers of fluid) from his chariot, the world is enveloped in darkness.

O Gods (ie, the sun's rays; 'gods' because they are bright)! Today, with the rising of the sun, may we human beings be freed from all sins. May all—Mitra, Varuṇa, Aditi, Sindhu, Pṛthvi, Dyaus—adore us; that is, may all gods protect us from evil.

Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedas

EDITORIAL

While discussing the significance of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda said that we must interpret the Vedas 'in the light of the experience of Sri Ramakrishna.'¹ By interpretation of the Vedas, Swami Vivekananda meant the deeper and profound spiritual truths which the Vedas contain. However, it is interesting to note that even superficially, the Vedas can be understood in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. A small effort has been made here towards that end.

Henotheism is Reasonable

The first thing we notice in the Vedas is the worship of several gods and goddesses. The Vedic sages worshipped and sang praises of Agni, Indra, Soma, Uśā, the Maruts, Varuṇa, and so on. The novelty of their adoration was that each god or goddess was called the supreme Being—the creator and sustainer of everything. Of the 10 *maṇḍalas* of the *R̥g Veda*, which contain 1017 hymns in all, many gods and goddesses are independently called the Supreme to the exclusion of all others. This idea of worshipping each god or goddess by turns, as if this divinity were the greatest and even the only God, has been termed 'henotheism' by Professor Max Muller.

To clearly understand what this henotheism means, we should resort to Sri Ramakrishna. When Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the Divine Mother, She became supreme to him, absorbing all of his mind. However, when he practised Islam or Christianity, or even Vedanta, the Divine Mother was ignored. Take the case of his Christian sadhana,

as a case in point. 'His love and devotion to the Devas and Devis vanished, and in their stead, a great faith in, and reverence for, Jesus and his religion occupied his mind.... He forgot altogether to go to the temple of the Divine Mother....'² When he looked upon himself as a handmaid of the Divine Mother during one of his spiritual moods, he 'often forgot that he had a male body.'³

One important point is to be noted here. If the Vedic seers worshipped numerous gods and goddesses, calling each one the supreme Being by turns, we should remember that they were adoring the one supreme Being alone. 'In India they reached monism...seeing through the veil of the manifold the unity which underlies it,' says Paul Deussen in *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (p. 13). Sri Ramakrishna's case was similar. Though he worshipped various gods and goddesses by turns, he knew fully well that 'in reality there are not two. There is only One. A man may call on God by any name; if he is sincere in his prayer he will certainly reach Him.'⁴

Vedic Seers had Childlike Faith

The Vedic sages honoured and exalted divinities in order to seek wealth, progeny, health, protection, light of knowledge, and so on. When we read hymn after hymn, we see the astoundingly innocent and simple faith that the sages had in gods. 'Come, sit here, partake of our oblations and offerings, give us these things..., ' they would say. The gods

2. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1978), pp. 338-9. [Hereafter *Great Master*.]

3. *Great Master*, p. 238.

4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 306. [Hereafter *Gospel*.]

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 7, p. 411. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

were so real to them. It was as if the gods were some superior beings, who were always near the Aryan people, and who provided them with whatever they wanted.

To know whether it was possible for gods to be so near or not, we should read Sri Ramakrishna's life. Let alone that incident where Ramakrishna assured Narendra that God could be seen, and that he saw Him more clearly than he did Narendra. There were countless others. For every small need Ramakrishna would approach the Divine Mother. One illustration. Totapuri was quite confused when he saw Ramakrishna run to the Divine Mother to seek permission for practising Vedanta sadhana. When Ramakrishna returned jubilantly, Totapuri imagined that Ramakrishna had his earthly mother's permission. Only eventually did he come to know, to his amazement, that Ramakrishna had the Divine Mother's permission.

What was the reason for the Vedic seers' innocent faith in gods and goddesses? It is interesting to note that the very word 'god' or '*deva*' means 'giver' among other things. In the *Nirukta* of sage Yaska, we find that the names of some of the gods and goddesses mean 'bringers of good to human beings.' 'Deva is one who gives to man (*devo dānād vā dīpanād vā*).' 'Who is Āditya? Āditya is he who brings everything to human beings (*ādityaḥ kasmāt, ādatte rasān, ādatte bhāsam*).' 'Dhātā is the sustainer of everything (*dhātā sarvasya vidhātā*).'⁵ That God is the dispenser of everything to the devotee is amply clear from Sri Ramakrishna's life. He says, 'I said to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, since You have placed me in this condition, provide me with a rich man." That is why Mathur served me for fourteen years' (*Gospel*, p. 934). Whatever he wanted, that the Mother provided him.

Vedic Worship was Natural

Whitney, the great Vedic scholar, says, 'In the early Vedic times the sacrifice was still,

in the main, an unfettered act of devotion...not regulated by its minor details, but left to the free impulses of him who offered it accompanied with *R̥g* and *Sāma* hymns and chants, that the mouth of the offerer might not be silent while his hands were presenting to the divinity the gift which his heart prompted.'⁶ Such unorthodox practices of the early Vedic priests can be appreciated when we read about Sri Ramakrishna's method of worship. He offered flowers to the Divine Mother, performed *ārati*, sang songs—all according to his heart. If he sat with a flower on his head, he perhaps sat meditating for two long hours. 'Again, singing for the Mother of the Universe in the afternoon or at the end of the Arati, he sometimes became so much absorbed...that he could be made to perform the Arati...only when he had been reminded again and again that it was getting late.'⁷

The Vedas Contain Everything

Till now we discussed only the devotional part of the Vedas. The Vedas do not consist of only hymns and chants; they contain many other things. The Vedas are classified into four subdivisions: *mantra*, *brāhmaṇa*, *āranyaka* and *upaniṣad*. It is the *mantra* (also called *saṁhitā*) portion which comprises hymns and prayers to gods and goddesses. The *brāhmaṇas* give details about various *yajñas* or sacrifices like *agniṣṭoma* or *jyotiṣṭoma*—the procedure, the items needed, the persons necessary, the mantras to be chanted, the fruits, and so on. Generally, the *āranyakas* and the *upaniṣads* are broadly grouped under the *brāhmaṇas* themselves (*mantra-brāhmaṇayor veda-nāmadheyam*). But the *āranyakas*, considered separately, contain both sacrificial and metaphysical elements in them. Finally come the *upaniṣads*: they deal with the *brahmatattva* or the supreme Reality. Thus, we can broadly rank the four parts as

5. Cf. Yaska's *Nirukta*, 7.15, 2.13, and 11.10, respectively.

6. Quoted by Radhakrishnan in *Indian Philosophy* (Mumbai: Oxford University Press, 1998), Vol. 1, p. 64.

7. *Great Master*, p. 161.

follows: the *mantra* portion is about devotion, the *brāhmaṇa* portion is about rituals, the *āranyaka* portion is about meditations, and the *upaniṣad* portion is about knowledge. This means that all the four yogas are dealt with in the Vedas. The Vedas, therefore, contain everything needed for the spiritual well-being of humanity. For the active type it suggests action; for the emotional type it suggests prayer and devotion; for the contemplative type it suggests meditation; and for the rational type it suggests knowledge. Swami Vivekananda says about Sri Ramakrishna: 'Such a unique personality, such a synthesis of the utmost of Jnana, Yoga, Bhakti and Karma, has never before appeared before mankind.'⁸

There is a corollary to this point. The Vedas are no doubt teachers of all paths; but they have a method of development. Though towards the 10th *maṇḍala* of the *R̥g Veda* there is some tendency towards knowledge, though the *āranyakas* are a mixture of teachings about sacrifices and knowledge, there is a systematic, sequential development in the Vedas. The Vedas begin with devotion—that is, prayers and hymns to various gods and goddesses. The next stages are those of the *samhitā* and the *brāhmaṇa*, where we find sacrifices and meditations dealt with. Finally comes the knowledge portion.

In Sri Ramakrishna's life also we find the same sequence. His life began with simple devotion; then he practised various disciplines like the Tantras and Vaiṣṇavism; later on, he entered the deeper contemplative stage, which culminated in the Advaitic *nirvikalpa samādhi*.

There is another way of looking at Vedic development. This development took place in three stages. The first was the religion of nature, or the nature-worship stage, in which the Vedic seers, enamoured with the beauty of nature around, adored rivers, sun, moon, stars, sky, and so on as divinities. The second

stage was the religion of injunctions, or the ritual stage, in which the sages observed set rules and laws in order to perform various types of *yajñas*. Finally, there came the religion of the Atman, or the Atman-Brahman stage, in which there was questioning, cogitating, contemplating and knowing the supreme Truth.

Such a development is evidenced in Sri Ramakrishna's life also. The religion of nature in his life was when he went into a trance during his seventh year. 'The enchanting view of the vast green fields fanned by the gentle breeze, the incessant flow of the river, the melodious songs of birds...' all held Ramakrishna (then Gadadhar) spellbound. One day, 'while roaming carefree in the fields, Gadadhar looked up towards the sky and saw a newly formed dark cloud and against it, the orderly movement of a flock of cranes in full flight with their snow-white wings outstretched. The...awareness of his own body and of all other earthly surroundings vanished altogether and he fell down unconscious' (*Great Master*, p. 56). This was the beginning. From the religion of nature, he went on to the religion of injunctions. So meticulously did he follow all the injunctions which he had to observe in the course of his various sadhanas that, though certain Tantric practices were abhorrent to him, he overcame his disgust by the power of his sincerity. Ultimately came the religion of the Self, the stage of Vedantic realization, in which he was so successful that his guru, Totapuri, was stunned: 'Oh, wonderful! How can I believe my eyes? Has this great soul actually realized in a day what I could experience only as a result of forty years of austere sadhana?' (*Great Master*, p. 291).

There was Something Greater

From ordinary worldly enjoyments, through the joys of heaven, to the supreme bliss of Brahman—the Vedas promise hundreds of experiences for those who follow their precepts. The culmination of Vedic experiences is when the individual sees every-

8. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 412.

thing as Brahman alone—*sarvam khalvidam brahma*—and attains the highest type of liberation, *jivanmukti*, freedom while living.

Speaking about himself, Sri Ramakrishna says that his spiritual experiences 'have gone beyond those recorded in the Vedas and the Vedantas' (*Great Master*, p. 365). He alone knows what all he underwent. However, it is generally believed that his state of *bhāvamukha*, remaining in the relative state by bringing down the mind that was tending towards *nirvikalpa samādhi* by sheer force, is something unknown to the Vedas. Again, it is said that his practising all faiths and experiencing the Truth through various paths is also unheard of.

What About the Vijñāni Stage?

There is one more idea which is interesting. Sri Ramakrishna has used the term *vi-jñāna* in an especial sense. But there is a stage beyond even *Brahmajnāna*. After *jñāna* comes *vijnāna*. He who is aware of knowledge is also aware of ignorance. ... That is why one should acquire *vijnāna*. ... What is *vijnāna*? It is knowing God in a special way...to talk to Him, to enjoy Him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved, is *vijnāna*. The realization that God alone has become the universe and all living beings is *vijnāna*' (*Gospel*, pp. 287-8). 'A man cannot live on the roof for a long time. He comes down again. Those who realize Brahman in *samādhi* come down also and find that it is Brahman that has become the universe and all its living beings. ... The man coming down from *samādhi* perceives that it is Brahman that has become the ego, the universe, and all living beings. This is known as *vijnāna*' (*Gospel*, p.104). Again, according to him, this *vijñāna* is an 'intimate knowledge of God' (*Gospel*, p. 852).

Do the Vedas contain this idea of *vijñāna*? According to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.12), the salt doll drowning in the limitless ocean and melting down therein is the state of *vijñāna*. This *Upaniṣad* also says (3.9.28) that *vijñāna* is the 'bliss of Brahman, *ānandam*

brahma.' The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (7.7.1,2) equates *vijñāna* with knowledge; but this knowledge is better than *dhyāna*, it says. Further, according to this *Upaniṣad*, through *vi-jñāna* one knows the four Vedas. When asked whether anything superior is there to *vijñāna*, this *Upaniṣad* replies that it is *bala*, strength. According to the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.5.1), '*Vijñāna* directs the sacrifice and actions, *vi-jñānam yajñam tanute, karmāṇi tanute'pi ca*.' One has to know Brahman as *vijñāna* so as to be firm in It (*vijñānam brahma ced veda, tasmāt cenna pramādayati*). The same *Upaniṣad* (3.5.1) says that one should know *vijñāna* to be Brahman (*vijñānam brahmeti vyajānāt*). For the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.3.6), *vijñāna* is only self-control. He who is possessed of *vijñāna* has his senses under control even as good horses are of a good charioteer, the *Upaniṣad* says. With such *vijñāna*, a person attains the state after which there is no rebirth. Amongst the minor *Upaniṣads*, the *Subāla Upaniṣad* (5.15) equates *vijñāna* with time (*vijñānamayaḥ kālātmā*). The *Maitreyayupaniṣad* (3.3) has a reference to *vi-jñāna*. Maitreya describes his spiritual realization and says, 'I am *vijñāna*, I am *viśeṣa*, I am *soma*....'

From what was discussed above, Sri Ramakrishna's *vijñāna* and that in the *Upaniṣads* are quite different. Perhaps Sri Ramakrishna meant something far deeper than what the Vedas meant!

The Vedas Revered Women

The Vedas, apart from teaching the four paths to the Supreme, deal with various other topics. Of them, the equality of men and women is one. When, during the previous centuries, women were considered subservient to men and they remained hidden always, this Vedic ideal was naturally forgotten. In the *Ṛg Veda* we find this prayer to Agni:⁹ 'O Agni, make the minds of husband and wife (*daṃpatī*) of one higher purpose, so that together they may become your friend and

9. *Añjantī mitram sudhito na gobhir-yad-daṃpatī samanasā kṛṇoṣi*. —*Ṛg Veda*, 5.3.2.

adore you.' In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find such a prayer made: after his marriage, he prayed to the Divine Mother, saying that his wife must not have any inclination towards the world and its enjoyments. When he closely observed Holy Mother Sarada Devi later, Sri Ramakrishna understood that she was far more pure and immaculate than anyone can imagine purity to be. Sri Ramakrishna also accepted a woman as his guru during a period when women were always confined to the inner apartments.

There are several other ideals of the Vedas which are explained in Sri Ramakrishna's life. It all shows how a single personality, in a span of fifty years, could achieve what Indian sages taught after centuries of struggle. Hence Swami Vivekananda said:

The life of Shri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of Hindu religion. He was the object-lesson of all the theoretical knowledge given in the Shastras (scriptures). ... The books were theories, he was the realisation. This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations.¹⁰

The Vedas had a Basic Ideal

When we study the Vedas—from the *samhitās* to the *upaniṣads*—a particular ideal strikes us. That ideal is renunciation. Imperceptibly though, the Vedas teach renunciation. From the hymns to the *upaniṣadic* mantras, from simple prayers to the elaborate

Vedic rituals, there is one thing present always; that is the ideal of giving up. The renunciation of the Vedic sages was natural. They gave various possessions to gods so as to attain various other things. The very word *yajña* or sacrifice means to give, to offer. Finally, during the *upaniṣadic* period, it was made clear that without renunciation one can never attain the supreme Truth. This does not mean that all should become monks and nuns. The Vedic sages were all not necessarily monastics: they were noble householders. But the ideal was to give up the lower so as to attain the higher. 'Neither by activities, nor by progeny, nor by wealth does one attain immortality. It is only through renunciation that one attains that,' declare the Vedas.¹¹ The Vedas never say that spirituality and enjoyment are complementary. The paths of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* are different, they declare.

Holy Mother says that Sri Ramakrishna's ideal in life was renunciation: 'I tell you, my son,...that *renunciation* is his special message in this age. Did anyone see such natural renunciation anytime before?'¹²

Whether Sri Ramakrishna practised Islam or Vedanta, whether he practised the ideal of handmaid of God or that of servant of God, he had one basic ideal alive throughout his life: that was renunciation.

Thus, Sri Ramakrishna lived a life which was an embodiment of Vedic ideals. □

11. *Na karmaṇā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaike amṛtatvamānaśuḥ.* —*Kaivalya Upaniṣad*, 2.

12. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1969), p. 463.

10. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 62.

The Householder's Life is Sacred!

The householder's life is more sacred than the ascetic's life. You please find out one scripture in the old Hindu philosophy and religion where it says married life is much lower, or in any way lower than unmarried. ... Married life is very difficult actually. Our Hindu scriptures say that married life is the most difficult if you lead married life properly.

—Swami Trigunatitananda

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

How Tables Turn!

When the news of Akbar's invasion came, ministers convinced Uday Singh (1540-1572) to hide in the hills. Uday Singh escaped, leaving behind 8000 soldiers to guard Chitor. Akbar came with a huge army. Days and months passed by, but Chitor would not yield. All the modern techniques of Akbar—cannons, batteries, mines—failed. As soon as a mine was laid to breach the fort, some people from inside would fill it up. The dexterity of the whole thing surprised Akbar. After six long months, Akbar was tired of waiting and decided to give up. The evening before the day of retreat, on 23 February 1568, 'Akbar noticed at the breach a person wearing a chief's cuirass who was busy directing the defence.' Akbar had a pistol; he fired, and that man fell; and suddenly the tables turned. That very night, there was an inferno inside the fort, and there were loud cries. Akbar came to know that *jauhar* had been performed and thousands of women and children had died. The next morning, valiant Rajputs opened the gates of the fort, fought bravely, and died. The shame of Akbar was his ordering more than 30,000 non-combatants, the civilians, to be butchered. Now, what had happened to the fort? The hero in charge of the fort was Jaimal. His command over the tiny army of 8000 was incredible. He ate less, slept less, and personally supervised all functions, thereby holding the Mughal emperor at bay. In an ill-fated moment, Jaimal showed himself to Akbar, and was killed. Once he died, there was no leader and the soldiers gave up hope (cf. *The Mughal Empire*, ed. R.C. Majumdar, pp. 333-4).

Such is Their Greatness!

'Some Upanishads are older than any *extant* form of Greek philosophy, and Pythagoras, Parmenides and Plato seem to have been influenced by Indian metaphysics. ... Victor Cousin believed that "we are constrained to see in this cradle of the human race the native land of the highest philosophy." ... But nowhere else has the lust for philosophy been so strong as in India. It is, with the Hindus, not an ornament or a recreation, but a major interest and practice of life itself; and sages receive in India the honor bestowed in the West upon men of wealth of action. What other nation has ever thought of celebrating festivals with gladiatorial debates between the leaders of rival philosophical schools? ... The victor in a vital debate was as great a hero among his people as a general returning from the bloody triumphs of war,' says Will Durant in *Our Oriental Heritage* (p. 533).

A Gigantic Temple

Hieun Tsang says that the great temple in Nalanda, built by Narasimha Gupta, was more than 300 feet high! The temple is not there now but historians and archeologists say that the massive basement that remains absolutely justifies Tsang's statement (cf. *The Classical Age*, ed. R.C. Majumdar, p. 513).

On Reincarnation

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Invited by different institutions, Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, currently President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, used to tour various countries every year, to spread the eternal message of Vedanta. During one such tour in 1982, he, at the request of the Head of Vivekananda-Vedanta Society, Chicago, conducted a ninety-minute question and answer session. In this issue we have published revered Swami's illuminating and refreshing answer to only one of the questions. His other answers we like to publish in the subsequent issues.

Question: *Could you please give us the view of the Vedanta Society regarding reincarnation?*

Swamiji: In the Hindu religion and in all the religions born in India, like Buddhism and Jainism, there is this wonderful theory of reincarnation; it says that you achieve spiritual liberation by struggling through life after life, and finally, when your mind is sufficiently ripe in the last birth, you attain spiritual realization. The aim of life is spiritual realization. That spirituality is already within us, only we don't know how to manifest it, and so we struggle. But, in one life we are not able to achieve all this spiritual development and realization. So, the Hindu sages said, 'Man travels from life to life to complete this process.' That was discovered and beautifully expressed by a close study of the human personality. Every human being has two bodies. One is the physical body, called the gross body. In Sanskrit it is called *sthūla śarīra*; *sthūla* means gross, tangible. The other is the subtle body, *sūkṣma śarīra*. All your desires, all your emotions, all the subconscious and unconscious elements of your nature, all the impressions of the actions that you do, constitute your *sūkṣma śarīra* or the subtle body; that is the real human being. The external man is only a container. This gross body functions only in the waking consciousness of man. There is a third subtler body called the causal body, the *kāraṇa śarīra*. The gross body dominates the waking state, the subtle body dominates the dream state, and the causal body

dominates the deep sleep or *suṣupti* state. Witnessing all these three states is the infinite Atman, ever free, pure, and luminous, known as the *sākṣī* or witness—witness of the subjects and objects of all the three states, called in Vedanta the *avasthā traya sākṣī*. This is the true Self of all beings, ever pure, ever free, ever illumined; it has no birth or death. But, when caught up in the net of the physical body, it passes through various life experiences, including life and death. So, at the time of death, we leave behind this gross body, and the subtle body continues. Even now, it is the subtle body acting in me. My digestion is done by my subtle body, my cells are being generated in the body only through the subtle body. The gross body does not do anything about it. But it gets the benefit of the activities of this subtle body. Finally, this *sūkṣma śarīra* leaves this body finding it useless for its purpose. That is called death, and it takes another birth and there continues the struggle. Thus, we continue life after life, sometimes going up and sometimes going down, but by and large, slightly gaining something until a certain maturity comes. All the evils and all the bad *saṃskāras* or impressions are finally destroyed, are burnt away in the fire of spiritual knowledge, spiritual realization, and this kind of birth and death cease for us. A seed, when it is burnt in fire, has no power to sprout if it is sown. Similarly, the seeds called tendencies in human beings, *saṃskāras* or *vāsanās*, are burnt in the fire of spiritual knowledge, the fire of spiritual realization. Then there is

no more birth, no more death; we become free. That is the state of *mukti* or spiritual freedom. That is why Sri Krishna says in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*: '*Aneka-janma-samsiddhah tato yāti parām gatim*, through various births one attains the supreme state.'

A human being struggles to be a yogi. In one life he or she is not able to attain much. Something, however, has been achieved; and the struggle continues until, in the last birth, the person is mature enough; he or she realizes the Truth and becomes free. This is the concept of reincarnation. It has been upheld in India by the most brilliant minds and great intellects and not by ordinary people, not by magical and miracle-workers: by men like Buddha, Sankaracharya, Sri Krishna, and today, Swami Vivekananda. Earlier, the Upanishadic sages gave this wonderful teaching because they discovered the invisible subtle body in the human being over and above the visible gross body. This gross body which you can see with your eyes and can handle is all that the West knows about man. But India holds that when this body dies, the human being does not cease to exist but continues the march. That is why, death is only a semicolon, and the sentence continues, the chapter continues. Death is but a forgetting, and we return to a new life.

The only objection against reincarnation is that you don't remember your previous life. That is because, nature has put a cover over the memory of past lives to help human evolution continue entirely looking ahead. Memory of past lives will obstruct our spiritual evolution. So nature has been kind to humanity by blocking that memory. The criticism, that because you do not remember your past life it is false, is itself false; for, memory is not the criterion of existence. You did not exist as a child because you do not remember what you did in your childhood; can this happen? This, then, is the theory of reincarnation, *punarjanma*, as it is called in Sanskrit. *Punah* means again, *janma* means birth. That is the

concept of reincarnation. In the *New Testament*, you read Jesus himself directly asserting that John the Baptist was the prophet Elias come back again: 'If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come.'

We cannot say that genetics negates reincarnation. Sir Julian Huxley wrote to me after reading my book *The Message of the Upanishads*, published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay [cf. pp. 594, 602 and 603]:

You have written: On page 314 (of the *Message*), I simply don't understand what is meant by 'the truth of survival' of the human personality. This is a hypothesis, which various religions have sought to establish as certainty—even proclaimed as 'certainty'—but no one (including the spiritualists) has succeeded in establishing it as a fact. I, like many others, would *like* it to be true, but there is no proof. As for *reincarnation* (p. 313), not only is there no proof of this, but the facts of genetics make it impossible—at least for me.

In my reply, among other things, I wrote [p. 602]:

When biology becomes dominated less by the marvels of technological achievements and more by the spirit of pure science in search of the mystery of existence, it is bound to capture that chastened mood of twentieth-century physics and an awareness of its own limitations in the presence of that mystery. ... It is then bound to recognize that its breaking of the genetic code through the discovery of DNA and RNA etc is only breaking the mystery of its *chemical* code but not its *psychical* code. The breaking of that latter code will call for new approaches and methods which, when recognized, will bring physical science closer to Vedanta. This may well become the dominant theme of the next revolution in thought, perhaps in the twenty-first century.

Physical science may now find genetics a hurdle to the acceptance of the spiritual

nature of the human being, the possibility of its independence of the physical organism, and the possibility of its manifestation through new bodies on the death of the old. But Vedanta does not recognize this as an irreconcilable opposition because it does not find any irreconcilable opposition between mind and matter as found in Western philosophy, or between soul and body as found in Western theology. Genetics seeks to explain the *physical bases* of life; it has already discovered the chemical factors in this field. The soul or *sūkṣma śarīra* that manifests through the genetic constitution of man, says Vedanta, has also a part to play in the genetic and life processes, which cannot be explained fully by physical factors alone. Neither heredity nor environment nor chance can fully explain the mystery of man. ...

Molecular biology has now some understanding of the genetic material and its chemical properties and processes. But the conclusions about life as a whole, based on this understanding, are bound to undergo revolutionary changes as and when molecular biology develops, as in the case of twentieth-century physics, into first its atomic and then its nuclear dimension. Nuclear physics reduced all matter to energy in Einstein's famous equation. Molecular biology is already on the threshold of reducing its factors of heredity, namely

the genes, from entities to forces and from forces to just influences. ... The indeterminacy principle of quantum physics is likely to invade genetics then, raising more serious problems than in physics; for the indeterminacy in physics led some scientists to banish all matter from the world of physics, 'mind reigning supreme and alone.' A similar indeterminacy in biology is likely to land it on the shore of the same truth, but with greater force, since biology is the study, at close quarters, of a non-entropic system which is life.

Till such compulsions arise from genetics itself, survival and reincarnation, in fact, the very idea of a non-material spiritual principle, must remain a mere hypothesis for physical science—but a hypothesis fascinating and intriguing, and not seriously opposed, as some scientific thinkers have acknowledged, to verified scientific knowledge.

Genetics alone cannot explain the different mental states and tendencies and life interests of children of same parents. The bodies of the children bear the genetic impress of their parents but not the minds. One child may grow into a technologist, another a businessman, a third one musician, and a fourth one religious. These differences reveal the insufficiency of the physical basis of life and demand a psychical factor also. □

Attention Dear Reader! WE WANT YOUR OPINION!

**You hear some people say, 'Everything is decided by fate.'
You hear some others say, 'No! It all depends on self-effort!'
Now, what do YOU say? Is fate powerful or self-effort?**

- * In NOT MORE THAN 150 WORDS, please send your opinion about this doubt.
 - * REMEMBER: Absolutely no quotations, either direct or indirect!
 - * Mention your full name, address, occupation, and age. On the envelope, 'My Thoughts'.
- The best opinions will be published. Your ideas should reach us before 15 April 2000.

Address your ideas to

The Editor, Prabuddha Bharata, PO Mayavati, via Lohaghat, Dt Champawat, UP 262524

Here's Some Good News!

DR M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

The author of the recently released book, Re-visioning Ramakrishna, Prof Sivaramkrishna is well-known for his writings. Here, he has some wonderful news to share with our readers. The author likes to thank Sri P. Niroop, advocate of the Supreme Court, New Delhi, for drawing his attention to the 'news.'

'I want to tell you—stop struggling. The Master does not want you to struggle. Let the Master pick you up and carry you. You know that saint Ramakrishna said we should be like the kittens—allow the Master to pick you up and carry you. Don't struggle, don't resist. The Master, the Mother—they are the mother cats, they will carry you, the kittens.'

So says a character in Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* (Vintage: 1998; pp. 104-5): the most lively and unpretentiously mystical of her novels. This seems an appropriate foregrounding for the great Master vis-a-vis the new millennium. He glides through categories and narratives: both foundational and fictional. As seems likely, he would continue to startle people in every area, in nearly every discipline. Startle not with the exotic and the bizarre but with a pang of recognition that all along they were (and *are*) kittens in His/Her lap, mewling precociously (actually, plaintively). He watches with delight: their antics and idiom.

'Stop struggling,' he exhorts. Struggle and strife should cease, but cease not as something negative and therefore to be exorcised. His struggle is positive and it ranges from our struggle to relate to him to the struggle between individuals, families, societies and nations.

The exhortation is what Harry R. Moody and David Carroll identify as, 'a call for everyone who has ever asked, "Is This It?"' This is no call of the psychiatrist's couch or for pathological self-pity. It is—the authors cite the Master's words—faith 'like a child calling

for its mother in the night.'¹

The night, in the millennium that just ended, had been quite nightmarish. But not for the Master: he *saw* the whole thing: the horror but alongside horror the glory. He saw the Mother birthing, tending and—the horror of it—masticating the child outgrowing Her lap. S/He 'saw' the Hiroshima horror, the Nagasaki nightmare, the Bosnia terror. And the 'flower' children, the drugged, the drunken—the entire spectrum of power and pelf and the pity of it. The proliferation of the grotesque, the horrifying must have been intoxicating; for, the Master sang long ago: 'This time I shall devour Thee, Mother!' And the Mother is certainly doing that! It is His/Her *lila*!

But to be devoured by the Master/Mother is to re-enter their womb. Once the womb and the lap are perceived the dark vision of the terrible ceases, the sublime takes over. Both Kali and Krishna coexist in Ramakrishna, the sword and the flute. But the Master has no metaphor-myopia. The balanced vision is endorsed through enactment. He transposes the Mother in the temple into the Mother in the *nahabat*, the macro becomes the micro and vice versa. As Cannel Berkson says, 'women saints, worshipped even today all over India,' are the Devi incarnate as well and 'Sri Sarada Devi, for one, the wife of

1. Harry R. Moody and David Carroll, *The Five Stages of the Soul: Charting the Spiritual Passages That Shape Our Lives* (London: Rider, 1998), p. 237.

Ramakrishna, is believed by millions to have been the Divine Holy Mother, the Goddess in temporal form.²

Sounds like the prattle of the devout? But then the prattle of the Mother's child is, perhaps, the dialect of the millennium. One could cite what Wayne Morrison, a New Zealand barrister and solicitor (as well as an academic) has to say :

Coercion and consensus, the power to destroy and the power to enable, to create, lie intertwined. The flute is the symbol of the intoxicating beauty of the eternally youthful Krishna, while the sword is the symbol of Kali who represents all the horrifying aspects of destructive forces.

That a study of jurisprudence by a Barrister should cite Kali/Krishna is quite a post-modernist move. And the further surprise is Morrison citing Ramakrishna: 'In the writings [*sic*] of the 19th century Hindu saint, Sri Ramakrishna, a passionate devotee of Kali, the Divine Mother, the being of the goddess is to contain at the same time a unity of opposites.'³

I said surprised by Morrison referring to Ramakrishna. But should we? The great Master's mantra draws from legal idiom: 'Give the power of attorney' to the Mother! Then everything falls into piece/peace. And this is certainly the union of opposites. Perhaps, when resolving opposition becomes difficult, psychoanalysts themselves may run to Ramakrishna. Enough evidence exists now that Freud was not that innocent of Hindu psychological insights as scholars would like to think for hegemonic purposes. Freud *did* receive from Romain Rolland himself his biographies of the Master and the Disciple.

It seems that, thanks to Girindrasekhar Bose (born, incidentally in the year the Master left his mortal frame, 1886!), Vishnu's image found His way on to Freud's desk as a mark to celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday. Vishnu on the desk and Ramakrishna's life on the shelf is quite fascinating cameo.⁴

Here the Master and the Millennium are in strange texts and contexts. Considering the fact that Ramakrishna is now the focus of the discourse of desire as structured in tantra, one can well perceive Vishnu's image being confined to Freud and Ramakrishna displacing it—on both the academic's desk and the psychoanalyst's couch (if any are still left!).

Strange and seemingly bizarre winds blow from academic desks, too. Perhaps, Mother Kali is, Herself, commending Her most complex child as, to date, the most disarmingly challenging. Thus anyone concerned with the discourse of desire (who is not?) is bound to *cut* his/her teeth on this child's unique inwardness. Whether the structure is tantra or bhakti, the Master holds the key to unlock the mystery of desire and the Divine. Or, rather Desire *as* divine. 'Even' the wayward and the wilful, the perverse and the puerile will find in this *kripalu*—the Merciful One—something that redeems, in spite of themselves. Indeed, the prodigal son's return is assured!

Carmel Berkson is, perhaps, right: 'There is no final solution, only a continuing struggle with the Mother Goddess; so, for the Hindu, the millennial hope of the devotee is tempered by reality; struggle, not fantasies of paradise, is the hope for mankind.'⁵

The Master would say 'Amen!' to this but, perhaps, recommend omission of 'Hindu'! 'In search of Mother' is the new Millennium's mantra. □

2. Carmel Berkson, *The Divine and the Demonic: Mahisha's Heroic Struggle with Durga* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 94.

3. Wayne Morrison, *Jurisprudence: From the Greeks to Post-Modernism* (London: Cavendish Publishing Ltd; Indian reprint: Delhi: Lawman [India] Pvt Ltd, 1997), pp. 18-9.

4. See *Vishnu on Freud's Desk*, ed. T.G. Vaidyanathan (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), specially the essays by Willi B. Parsons and Christiane Hurtuack.

5. Carmel Berkson, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

Medical Progress During the Past Millennium

DR V. S. JAYARAM

'Look to your health; and if you have it, praise God, and value it next to a good conscience; for health is the second blessing that we mortals are capable of...' (Izaak Walton in The Compleat Angler). Health, and consequently medical progress, is vital to any development. What were the developments in medicine during the previous millennium? Dr V.S. Jayaram, Professor of Microbiology, Dr Ambedkar Medical College, Bangalore, presents a systematic survey in this article.

Ayurveda

Ever since man has emerged as a thinking animal, the study of disease and the alleviation of pain and suffering have been going on. The source of ancient Vedic medicine is found in the *Atharva Veda*, which dates as far back as the 2nd millennium BCE. The divine physician Dhanvantari is said to have received Ayurveda from Brahmā and taught it to Śuśruta. In those days the *vaidya* was held in great esteem—'*vaidyo nārāyaṇo hariḥ*' goes the popular Sanskrit saying. The period of Vedic medicine lasted until about 800 BCE. Its concept of health was based on the precise balancing of three chief elements, spirit, phlegm and bile. Diseases were attributed to disturbed relations between them. Diseases were classified under several groups like fever, cough, consumption, diarrhoea, dropsy, seizures, tumours, etc.

The period between 800 BCE and 1000 CE is considered the golden age of Indian medicine. The most memorable treatises were written during this period by the great physician Caraka and the surgeon Śuśruta, which bear testimony to the profound advancement, specially in anatomical and surgical concepts.

In the *Śuśruta Samhitā*, specifications of surgical instruments such as blunt (*yantra*) and sharp (*śastra*) knives, saws, scissors, cups and so on are listed. Operative procedures for removal of urinary stones and draining of

abscesses are described. Notable progress in plastic surgery, specially rhinoplasty, was also made.

A similar treatise on medicine was written by the physician Caraka. The diagnosis of diseases was based on the five senses, including smell and taste. Importance was given to prognosis.

Later works include a text on pathology by Vāgbhaṭṭa and a treatise on clinical medicine, the *Bhāva Prakāśa*. A celebrated passage in the *Śuśruta Samhitā* indicates the relation between mosquitoes and malarial fever, and warns about dwellings where repeated rat-fall is reported—which suggests a knowledge of the spread of plague. These books also describe the use of medicinal plants and methods of blood-letting, cupping and application of leeches.

In recent years, there is a growing interest in alternative medicine and Ayurveda is becoming quite popular. However, in this article, we shall concentrate on the Western system popularly known as allopathy.

The concept of disease as a pathological process developing in the body than as a visitation from the spirits, was formulated for the first time by Hippocrates (460-377 BCE). The period of transition from medieval to modern medicine coincides with the beginning of the Renaissance. The period between 1453-1600 CE was an age of individual scientific endeavour.

Paracelsus (1493-1541), the alchemist, introduced critical enquiry which led him to denounce superstition and dogma. Eager to reform, he burnt the works of Galen and Avicenna and helped turn medicine into a rational research. Fracastoro of Verona propounded the concept of 'contagion', the mode of spread of disease from one person to another by direct or indirect contact. He spoke of the seeds of disease and explained the cause of epidemics, and also published a treatise titled *Contagion Vivum*, which marks the beginning of epidemiology. (Epidemiology is the study of disease-occurrence, spread, prevention, and control.)

Anatomy and physiology, the knowledge of the human body and its workings, were the first aspects of medical learning to receive attention from those who realized the need for reform. Belgian Vesalius founded the modern study of anatomy (literally, 'cutting up') by careful dissection of corpses and meticulous observation. Thus he raised anatomy to the level of a science. His great work, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem*, was published in the 16th century and became a classic in medical education. William Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood and movements of the heart by experimental methods were the most important landmarks of medical progress of the 17th century, and laid the firm foundation of modern physiology. The French physiologist, Claude Bernard, contributed significantly towards the understanding of digestive processes, specially the metabolic functions of the liver. Morgagni (1682-1771), a professor from Padua, initiated the scientific study of gross morbid anatomy (a branch of pathology or the science of disease, which deals with gross changes). His contribution was the correlation of the postmortem findings with the symptoms exhibited by the patient before death; he thus introduced the 'anatomical concept' into the practice of medicine.

Studies by Virchow (1821-1905) using the microscope paved the way for the 'cell



Seamen used to be incapacitated by scurvy: more died of this disease than through mishaps. James Lind, a British naval surgeon, proved in 1747 that citrus fruits etc were the remedy. He conquered scurvy. Here he is seen feeding a seaman with lemon juice.

theory' of alteration in the cells and tissues of the body due to disease. This marks the beginning of histopathology, the science of microscopic changes in tissues characteristic of disease. These methods have made 'biopsy' a routine method of diagnosis. Biopsy is the removal of living tissue for microscopic examination so as to establish diagnosis.

The Microscope and Microbial Life

One of the greatest of the early microscopists was Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, the Dutch draper from Delft. Grinding lenses was his hobby, which led him to devise an apparatus and develop a technique to observe micro-organisms. He was the first person to describe the existence of microbial life in 1683. However, the relevance of microbes to medicine was recognized about 200 years later. The presently used compound microscope is usually attributed to a spectacle maker, Zacharias Jansen, and to Robert Hooke.

Disease Prevention

Edward Jenner, a medical practitioner in Berkeley, observed that those who were infected with cowpox developed immunity to smallpox. This observation led him to inoculate an eight-year-old boy with the fluid from an eruption on the hand of a milkmaid. The boy escaped an attack of smallpox. This ep-

och-making procedure marks the beginning of immunization. Jenner's discovery remained an isolated observation until 84 years later, when Louis Pasteur established the scientific basis of immunity.

The Role of Germs

By the middle of the 19th century there was an awareness of the existence of microbes. Microbiology as a scientific discipline dates from Louis Pasteur (1822-85). Though trained as a chemist, his studies on fermentation led him to the idea that certain diseases were caused by specific germs. He developed the techniques of culture (ie cultivation of microbes in laboratories) and sterilization.

Pasteur's greatest achievement was the prevention of infectious diseases by injecting attenuated (ie tamed or weakened) germs. He developed vaccines against anthrax, chicken cholera and rabies. A vaccine is a suspension of killed or attenuated micro-organisms administered for immunization. The successful application of the anti-rabies vaccine was a milestone in the development of immunization. Pasteur coined the term 'vaccine' to commemorate such prophylactic preparations as were first used by Jenner, namely the cowpox vaccine. In gratitude for Pasteur's development of vaccine people from around the world contributed to the establishment of the Pasteur Institute in Paris, and similar institutions were started in many other countries for the preparation and distribution of vaccines.



Louis Pasteur

The complete establishment of the 'germ theory of disease' depended on the work of the German physician, Robert Koch. He devised and improved methods of growing bacteria in pure cultures or in 'isolation', staining of bacteria using dyes, and the use of animals for experimental infections. In 1882 he discovered germs that cause tuberculosis. The following year, while in Calcutta as the head of the Cholera Commission, he discovered cholera germs. Koch defined the criteria for attributing an organism as the cause of a specific disease, referred to as Koch's postulates.

Sepsis even after successful surgical operations took a terrible toll of the lives of hospital patients. Joseph Lister, an English surgeon who was prompted by Pasteur's work, investigated septic wound infections and introduced carbolic acid spray over the operative site and application of protective dressings, thus reducing the incidence of sepsis. The result was the birth of aseptic surgery as practised today.

In 1890, von Behring and Kitazato jointly developed an antiserum (antitoxin) from immunized horses to combat tetanus and diphtheria. In 1929, G. Ramon developed a biological preparation, the toxoid, to produce active immunization against the two diseases.

Tracking down of germs of other diseases such as malaria, leprosy and yellow fever followed in quick succession. In 1897, Ronald Ross discovered at Secunderabad the role of anopheline mosquitoes in the transmission of malaria.

It was not until the 1930s that much began to be known about viruses. Tissue and cell culture as means of growing viruses, and the development of the electron microscope by Ruska were two notable achievements that enabled Salk and Sabin to develop a safe and effective vaccine that helped the ultimate conquest of the crippler poliomyelitis during the mid-1950s.

Today, immunization and vaccination have become household words, used for the



Laennec, the inventor of the stethoscope, at the Necker Hospital auscultating a TB patient by applying his ear to the patient's chest. Note the wooden cylinder in his left hand.

effective prevention of tuberculosis (BCG), diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough (DPT), measles, mumps, rubella (MMR), hepatitis A and B, rabies, yellow fever, influenza, typhoid, cholera and plague. And still many more are on the way. Mass immunization campaigns have become very popular. 'Prevention is better than cure' is a saying that goes well with the times.

Developments in Diagnosis

The stethoscope, an instrument through which the physician listens to sounds arising in the interior of the body—from the heart and lungs, was invented by Laennec, a French physician (1781-1826). In earlier times the ear was applied directly to the chest wall, but Laennec first used a rolled up piece of paper, and then a hollow wooden cylinder. Gradually the modern binaural instrument was evolved with two earpieces and a separate chestpiece connected by rubber tubing.

It is extensively used in auscultation, a physical method of diagnosis by listening to the sounds of the heart and lungs, as well as certain conditions of the abdomen and for recording blood pressure.

The electrocardiograph (ECG) was developed in 1903 by William Einthoven. It consists of a galvanometer to obtain graphic recording of changes in the potential of electric

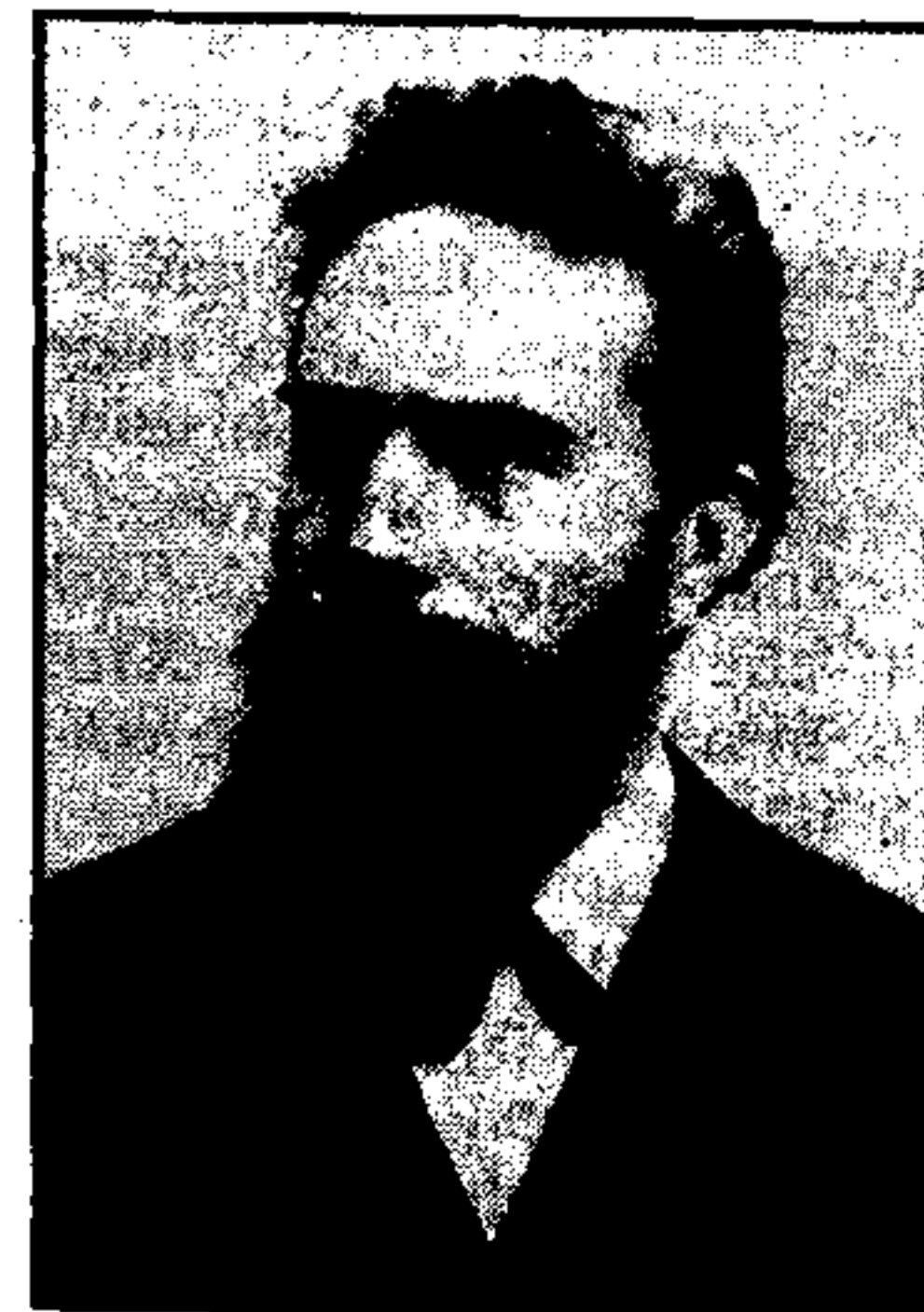
currents generated by the beating heart, picked up from the skin surface by electrodes applied to various parts of the body. The recorder traces changes in the potential on a moving band of paper. From the shape and pattern of the graphic tracings in the ECG, the physician can diagnose the rhythm of the heart beat, the condition of the heart muscle, changes after heart attacks (myocardial infarction) and the nature of cardiac pain (angina pectoris) due to deficient blood supply to the heart.

X-rays and Radiology

Wilhelm Konrad von Röntgen discovered X-rays in 1895. These rays possess the power of penetrating dense bodies that are impenetrable by light rays and give an image on a fluorescent screen or a photographic negative. It is vastly used in all branches of medicine as a valuable aid in the diagnosis of fractures and other diseases of bones and joints. Chest X-rays form a routine part of clinical diagnosis. X-rays are also useful in dentistry.

Pierre and Marie Curie discovered radium in 1898. It emits gamma rays which are similar to X-rays. It can be implanted into diseased tissues in the form of needles.

Deep X-rays, radium and cobalt 60 (a radioactive isotope) are used in the radiation treatment of certain types of cancers.



Wilhelm Konrad Röntgen, the discoverer of X-rays, revolutionized medicine and founded modern physics. He received the Nobel Prize for Medicine exactly 100 years ago.

Computed tomography, popularly known as the CT scan, was first introduced in 1972 by Godfrey Hounsfield. This is a special type of X-ray taken to show structures lying in a selected plane of the body. When the plane has been chosen, the X-ray tube and the plate rotate about it and so make an optical section of the body. A computer is used to reconstruct pictures of the body's interior. The result is a series of cross-sections, as though one were looking at the body separated into a series of thin slices.

Ultrasound imaging uses very high frequency sound waves; ultrasound is projected into the body and it bounces back. The process of imaging the deeper structures of the body by recording pulsed waves has many medical applications and is also useful in dentistry.

Painless Surgery and Anaesthesia

Before the introduction of anaesthesia, surgical operations were bloody and brutal. The administration of anaesthetics was introduced about 140 years ago. Morton, in 1846, used ether as a general anaesthetic, and a few months later, Simpson discovered the use of chloroform. The modern anaesthetist has a variety of drugs to induce general anaesthesia, such as nitrous oxide (laughing gas) and cyclopropane, through a closed system. In the endotracheal technique the anaesthetics and respiratory gases pass through a tube placed in the wind pipe via the mouth to establish a clear airway. The main effect is to produce loss of consciousness and relaxation of muscles. Other types of anaesthesia commonly used are regional, local, spinal and epidural, depending on the type of surgery. The latest addition is hypothermia, in which the body temperature is artificially lowered so as to enable the surgeon to preserve tissue vitality and operate on a bloodless field. This technique is used in brain and heart surgery.

Discovery of Blood Groups

Early attempts to transfuse blood from one individual to another were sometimes successful, but often ended in the patient's



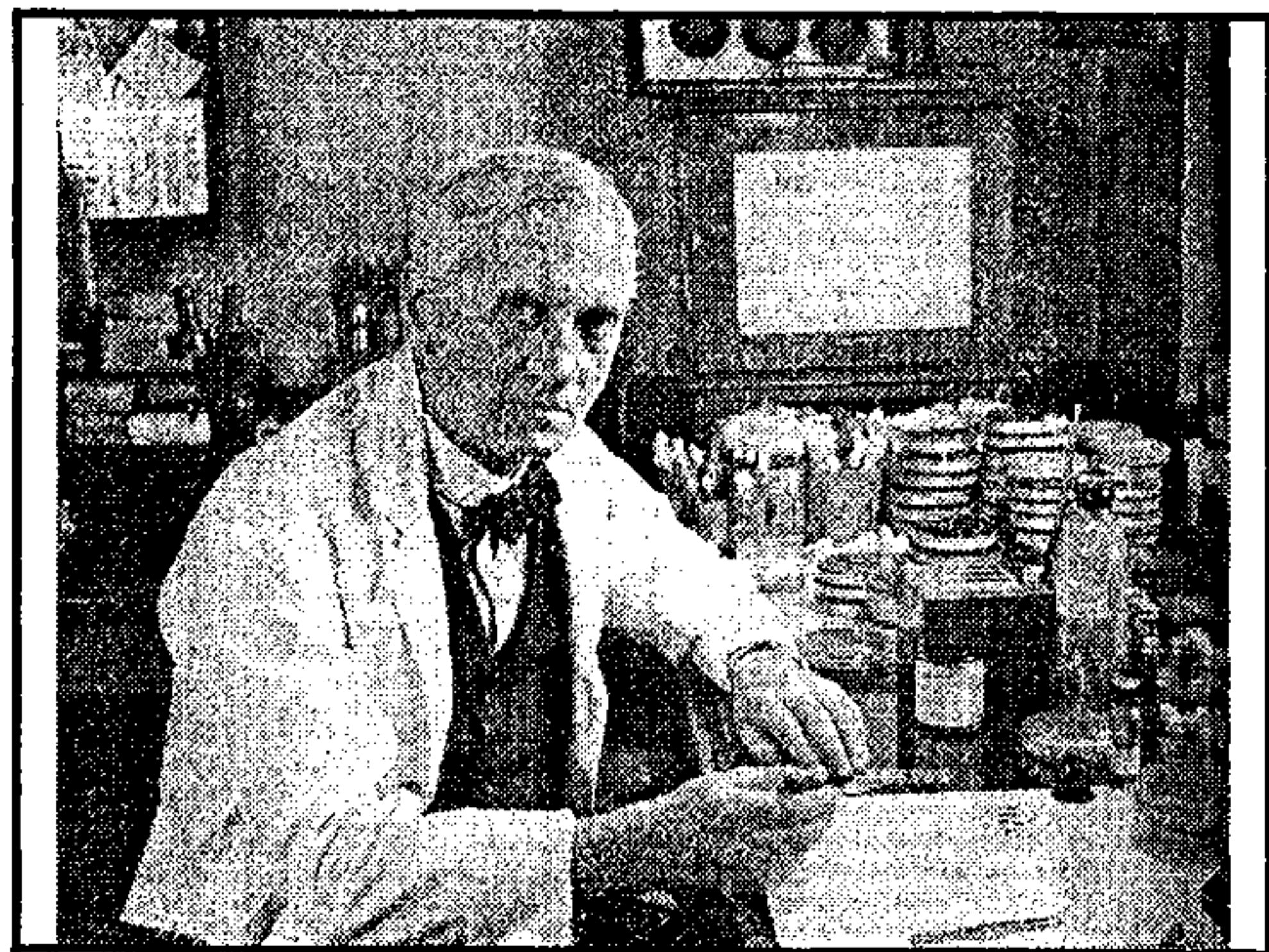
A dissection scene from Fasciculus Medicine (1495) by Johannes de Ketham. The professor in full academic costume, is reading his lecture from his chair, a junior colleague or ostensor points out the line of dissection to the students, while a menial demonstrator performs the actual dissection.

death. The reasons were not understood until 1902, when Karl Landsteiner discovered blood groups. The make-up of the blood group is inherited. Landsteiner showed that people could be divided into groups, A, B, AB and O (ABO grouping), some of which are not compatible with others. Blood can be donated to another person of the same group, except O blood, which can be given to any patient for there is no antigen on the red blood corpuscles. In 1940, Landsteiner with Weiner discovered another blood group factor, the Rh (as it is present in Rhesus monkey blood), thus explaining transfusion accidents with supposedly compatible blood, besides the now rare blood disease of the newborn, erythroblastosis foetalis.

The contributions of Landsteiner paved the way for the establishment of 'blood banks'. Transfusion of whole and fractionated blood has been so greatly advanced in recent years that it constitutes one of the important therapeutic achievements of the twentieth century.

Chemotherapy and Antibiotics

The modern era of chemotherapy (which means the use of chemical agents to treat infectious diseases) began with the work of



Alexander Fleming, benefactor of humankind

Paul Ehrlich in 1910. His 'magic bullet' Salvarsan, which was an organic arsenic compound, destroyed the germs of syphilis without harming the human body. Domagk in Germany reported success with a dye called Prontosil, a sulphonamide. Alexander Fleming's chance discovery in 1929 that penicillin, a soil fungus, can kill or prevent the growth of other disease-causing germs, and its subsequent purification by Florey and Chain ushered in the 'antibiotic era'. (An antibiotic is a substance produced by microbes and is capable of destroying or stopping the growth of disease-producing germs.) The second antibiotic to be discovered was streptomycin by Dr Seaman Waksman, effective against the germs of tuberculosis. Subsequently chloramphenicol, tetracyclines, cephalosporins, quinolones, etc were discovered. The list continues to grow every year.

Antibiotics are the most effective weapons against disease-causing bacteria and have saved countless lives and prevented debilitating illnesses. However, when misused, the bacteria may develop resistance, making them ineffective and leaving individuals much more vulnerable to attack.

Advances in Surgery

Surgical operations undreamt of in earlier years have now become a reality. Theodor Billroth performed the first gastrectomy, the successful removal of a part of the stomach for cancer. The advent of the endoscope and

endoscopic methods have made possible direct visual examination of any part of the interior of the body by means of an optical viewing instrument introduced through a natural opening, and are widely used for making a diagnosis.

After the advent of anaesthesia, asepsis, and blood transfusion, the practice of surgery was revolutionized. The introduction of the operating microscope and the benefits of high magnification have enabled delicate microsurgery of the eye, ear, and vasculature. The outlook on patients suffering from birth defects and serious diseases of the heart has greatly changed during the last thirty years, specially with the development of open heart surgery. In 1967, the South African surgeon Christiaan Barnard transplanted the human heart successfully.

Cardiovascular disease, which is considered the great modern plague because it is the leading cause of sudden and untimely death, has been tackled. The coronary bypass, in which a blood vessel is grafted for bypassing the blocked blood vessel to improve blood supply to the heart, is now a commonplace method of treatment. Other non-invasive procedures such as percutaneous transluminal angioplasty (PCTA), wherein a small inflatable balloon placed at the tip of a catheter is introduced through the limbs to dilate the blocked coronary blood vessel, is a life-saving, cost-effective procedure which causes minimal discomfort to the patient. The artificial electronic 'Pacemaker' for restoring the normal rhythm of the heart is another notable achievement.

Kidney transplantations were carried out long before but the major problem was rejection. The success of the transplant depends on overcoming rejection of the donor organ by the immune system of the recipient. The discovery of immunosuppressive drugs that make the body accept the donor organ has made transplant surgery successful.

The introduction of the laparoscope has enabled the present-day surgeon to perform

abdominal operations through a very small cut in the abdominal wall, without leaving a scar.

Changing concepts in eye-care have contributed towards the reduction of cases of blindness and betterment of vision. Improved diagnostic methods and surgical techniques such as modern methods of cataract removal, corneal transplantation, the use of laser beams and photo-coagulation to treat eye disorders have helped millions regain their eyesight.

Dentistry

Campaigns promoting the importance of oral hygiene and development of effective measures to combat tooth decay (dental caries) is the main endeavour of dentists. Dental practice has progressed well, resulting in several specialities like dental prosthetics (the making of artificial dentures), orthodontia (straightening of irregular teeth) begun by Fauchard and John Hunt, oral and maxillary surgery, and periodontology.

The discovery of accessory food factors which are essential in small quantities for the maintenance of normal health—the vitamins (a term coined by C. Funk in 1911), best known by the initial letters of the alphabet—is a remarkable achievement. Deficiency of these factors leads to avitaminosis and results in specific diseases like rickets, scurvy, beriberi, pernicious anaemia and many others. Prevention or cure is effected by the administration of appropriate vitamins.

Starling introduced the term 'hormone' for the internal secretions of the ductless glands. The network of these glands, known as the endocrine system, secretes hormones directly into the bloodstream. These glands include the pituitary, the thyroid, the parathyroids, the adrenals, the pancreas and the gonads. Secretions from these glands control the metabolism, growth, reproduction and functioning of other organs of the body.

In the history of hormones the outstanding event was the discovery of insulin by Banting and Best. This hormone enables the

body to metabolize sugar. Those suffering from diabetes were brought back from the jaws of death to active life.

Genetics

Remarkable developments in human genetics and molecular biological techniques with detailed study of the human genome, has not only laid bare the genetic basis of numerous diseases but also provided a sound basis for diagnosing and planning preventive strategies against inherited disorders. Genetic engineering techniques have permitted the in vitro development of many important human proteins (like the clotting factor VIII used to treat haemophilia).

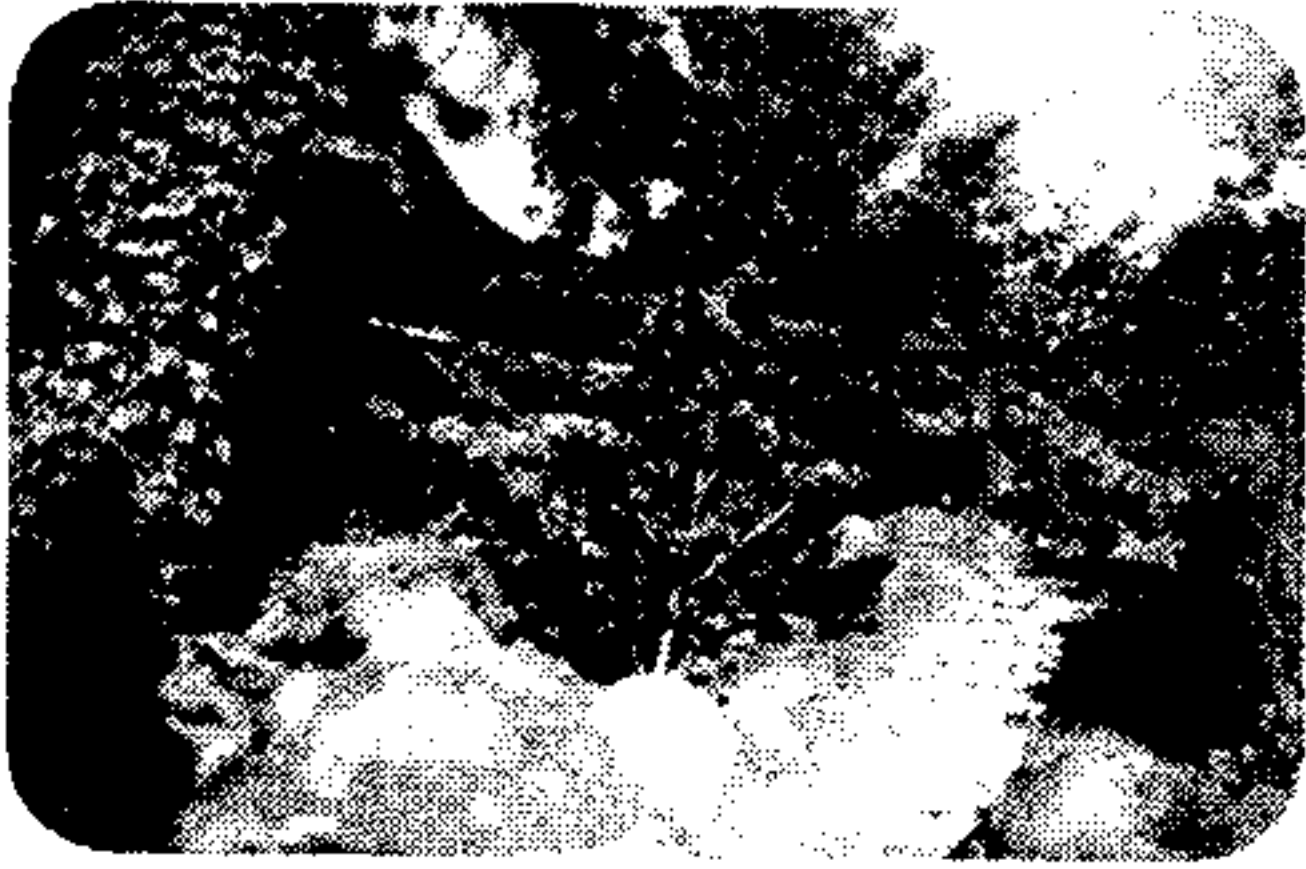
Our health depends upon the environment in which we live. Developments in public health and social medicine have traced the causes of morbidity and mortality to diverse factors. Pollution of water, air and soil, occupational health hazards, effects of tobacco smoking and chewing—all lead to various diseases, the last ones specially to cancer of the lungs and mouth. Improvements in sanitation and hygiene, efficient methods for the disposal of human waste, mosquito and fly control measures, vaccinations, etc have resulted in the promotion and betterment of human health, besides enhancement of life expectancy and longevity. Eradication of the deadly scourge smallpox; conquest of epidemics like cholera, plague and influenza are wonders of medicine; and prevention of infectious childhood diseases like diphtheria, whooping cough, polio and measles and reduction of infant mortality are among the medical miracles of this millennium.

Concluding Remarks

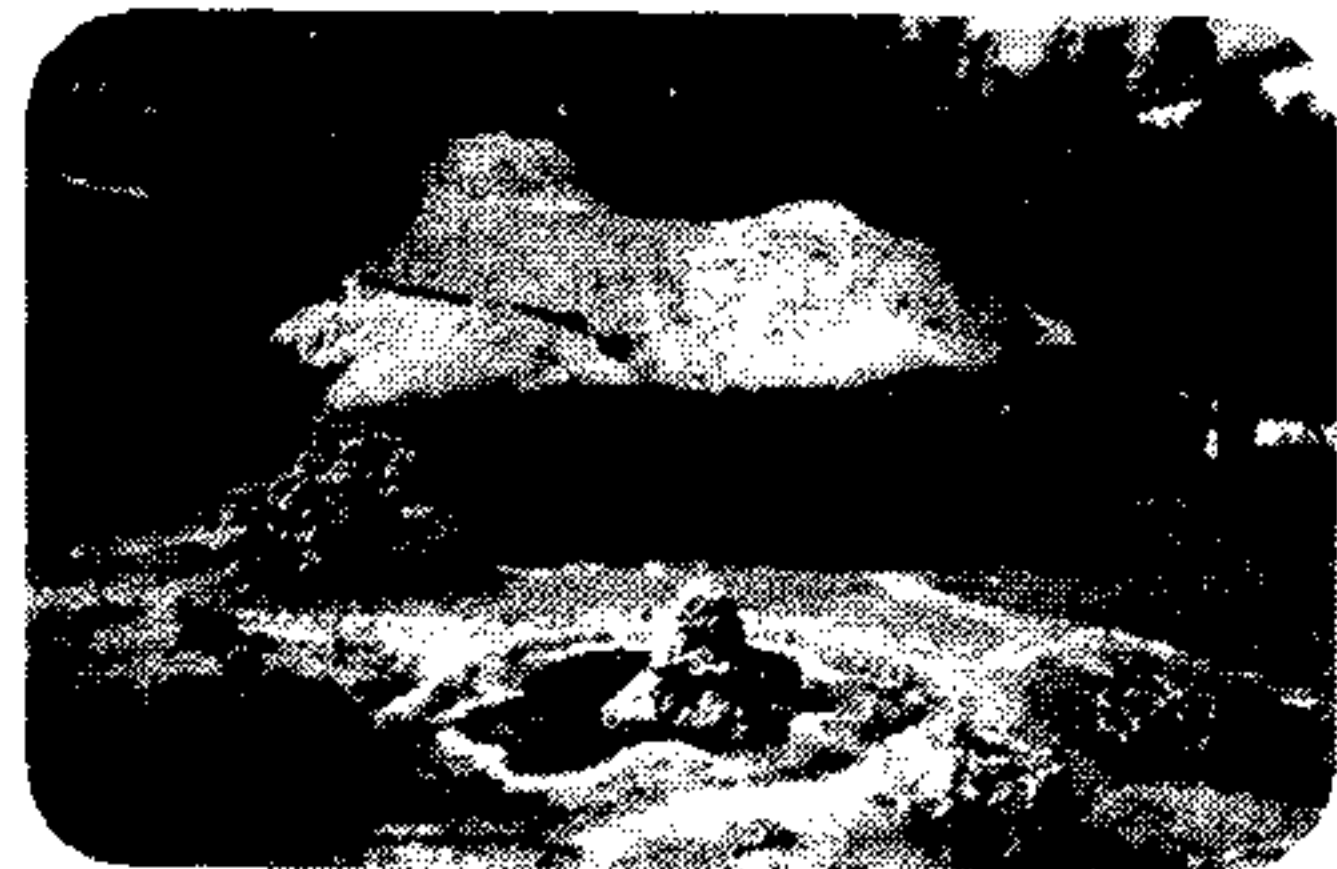
Despite the remarkable developments in health-care worldwide, large masses of Indians as well as other underdeveloped nations still lack easy access to even basic preventive and curative health services. Millions around the world continue to live under deplorably unsanitary conditions, ignorant of the basic rules of health and hygiene. As pointed out by the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, health,

along with education, ought to be kept in focus if India expects to be a genuinely developed nation. Unfortunately, the health sector is not so vital to our planners. Development

of universal health awareness and universal provision of basic health facilities are challenges that beckon us in the present millennium. □



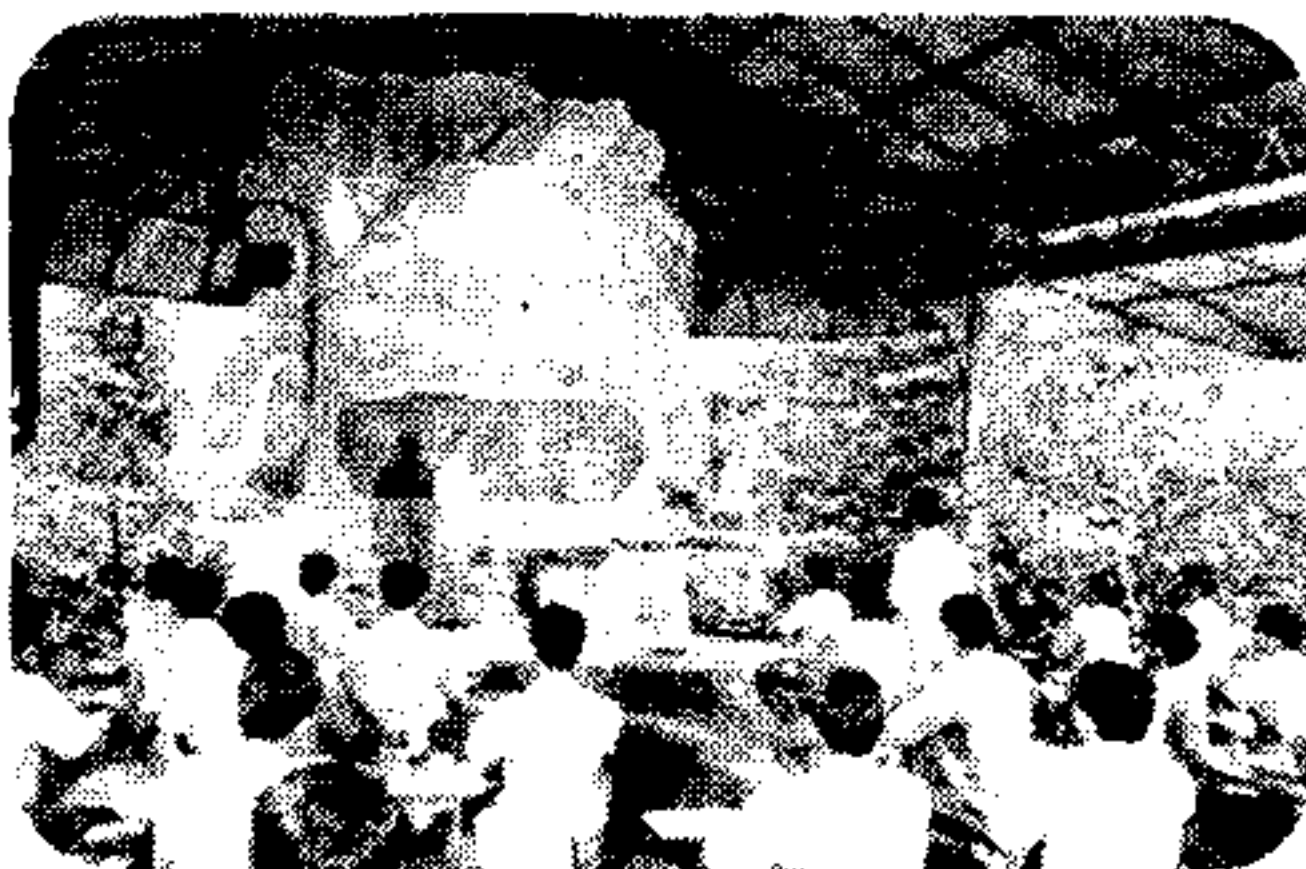
The road leading to Nature School



Nature School amidst sylvan surroundings

Nature School

Many Indian schools of today are congested. Classrooms are not worth their name. A hundred students crowd into such rooms! Sitting on the same bench, in the same jam-packed, boring room day after day, having come from congested houses by overcrowded roads will naturally tire young brains. If you force them to study so many subjects in such unwelcome surroundings, how will they? With the population graph shooting up always, schools are being opened in areas not worth inhabiting. In such a situation, many around the globe are thinking deeply about this problem. **Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore**, is an example of beauty, spaciousness, etc. Yet the monks there thought of providing something better for their brilliant students. Says Swami Mukti-dananda, the Correspondent: 'To break the monotony of sitting in the same classroom all through the year, we have designed the Nature School. Nature is said to be the mother of all education and the primary source of knowledge. Swamiji also said, "True education is gained by constant living in communion with nature." So we have successfully implemented this system.' Amidst greenery, sitting on lotus leaf-like seats, with birds singing around, the students eagerly learn what all is taught. The institution has a name in India for the best education. This innovation is sure to enhance it. Studying amidst nature will help bring out the best from children—the hope of the future.



Students are eager to learn!



The classroom: lotus leaf-shaped furniture

Nilkantha Mukhopadhyaya

Swami Prabhanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, and a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math, is a reputed scholar. He has several books, mostly research works, in English and Bengali to his credit. In this article, the author gives an interesting account of Sri Ramakrishna's association with a famous singer of his times.

shopkeeper sells an article, he sometimes gives a little extra something to the buyer. You sang at Nabin's house and have given the extra something here.'

Here is the reproduction. About three o'clock in the afternoon of 5 October 1884, Nilkantha Mukhopadhyaya, a renowned musician, came to Sri Ramakrishna with five or six companions. Sri Ramakrishna was in his elements in Nilkantha's company. He merrily told the artiste, who was highly acclaimed for his devotional songs, 'For you to have come here! You whom people see as a result of many austerities and prayers!'

By the expression 'extra something' Sri Ramakrishna referred to the charming songs Nilkantha Mukhopadhyaya sang for him free of charge. Nevertheless, this musical performance before Sri Ramakrishna was an epilogue, as it were, to the theatrical performance on that morning which Nilkantha had presented at Nabin Neogi's house at Dakshineswar. Nilkantha charged a fee for this. Sri Ramakrishna attended it and was pleased.

When the blissful Mother comes
to my house,
how much of the *Chandi* I shall hear!
How many monks will come here,
and how many yogis
with matted locks!

Among the luminaries of 19th century Bengal, particularly in the arena of devotional music, Nilkantha Mukhopadhyaya, the director of *Krishna Yātrā*, brilliantly stands out

1. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), pp. 600-1. [Hereafter *Gospel*.]

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): 'When a



Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi

for his talent as well as accomplishments. *Krishna Yātrā* was a form of popular music-drama, usually performed in meadows and courtyards. It is divided into four parts: *mān*, *kalanka-bhanjan*, *mathur*, and *milan*, each being followed by *dūtī-samvād* (reporting by a female companion). Nilkantha perfected this to a great extent.

The eldest son of Bamacharan Mukhopadhyaya and Saraswati Devi, he was born in 1842 (6 Māgh 1248 BY) in the village of Dhabani, in Burdwan district. The precocious Nilkantha even as a child drew the attention of all by his melodious voice. Extreme financial constraints of the Mukhopadhyaya family did not permit him to have any formal education even at the primary level. He learnt the elementaries of Bengali from his father. But endowed with a voice of extraordinary sweetness and force and with the love for music he had in abundance, he soon picked up popular devotional songs. At 14, his uncle helped him find a job in the private shop of Rammohan Pare. At the insistence of Rammohan's mistress, a lover of music, Nilkantha took formal training in music. Some years later he joined the theatrical party of Gopal Chandra Roy, himself an artiste of distinction

in vocal as well as instrumental music. Circumstances forced him to change parties several times till he joined the group of Govinda Adhikari. The latter's loving care and sympathetic treatment plus his able tutelage helped him to acquire mastery not only in vocal music but in composing devotional songs too, for which Govinda had a special flair.

In 1863, when he was 22, he organized a theatrical party of his own and began presenting musical-sketches composed by Govinda Adhikari and songs composed by Jayadeva and other Vaishnava scholars. He soon developed the art of composing songs. Welcoming hints from his critics, he began studying Vaishnava scriptures with the help of Radharam Goswami of Nachan-Pratapur.² This widened his knowledge and also deepened his vision as is reflected in his later compositions. His ready wit inspired him to compose verses extemporaneously. In the Bengal of his time he had hardly any peer in this field. One after another he composed several poems: *Mathur*, *Man*, *Kalankabhanjan*, *Kamsavadh*, *Chandalini*, *Uddhar*, *Yayatir Yajna* and others. Each composition bore witness to his genius. About Nilkantha's singing, Akshay Kumar Sen wrote, 'His singing could make water flow through dry rocks, dead branches bloom forth with fresh leaves and even make the serpent forget its nature.'³

Different from the songs of traditional *kirtan* and of the Baul school, the melody of his songs was distinctive. Known as *padas* (verses) of Kantha, his compositions carry the impact of Dasarathi Roy's (1806-1857) ideas. Another feature of his songs was that they revealed the extraordinary pangs of separation from the dear Lord and consequent grief. Among his compositions, the following song

2. Quoted in Gopesh Chandra Dutta, *Krishna Yatra O Nilkantha Mukhopadhyaya* (Bengali) (1976), p. 120. [Hereafter *Krishna Yatra*.]
3. *A Portrait of Sri Ramakrishna*, ed. Amrita Salm et al (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1998), pp. 616-7.

is lauded as his masterpiece. Highly appreciated by Sri Ramakrishna as also by Swami Vivekananda, the song began:

Oh, when will dawn the blessed day
When love will waken in my heart?
When will my tears flow uncontrolled
As I repeat Lord Hari's name,
And all my longing be fulfilled?⁴

Though he had his spiritual initiation from Kavinda, a Shakti worshipper, his active participation in theatrical songs, mainly centering round Radha-Krishna opened up the hidden fountain of his love for Krishna. He himself installed a deity of Radhavallabh in his house.

Nilkantha had married twice. Following the demise of his first wife, Mokshada Devi, he had married Kadambini Devi. As they had no male child, Kadambini Devi persuaded him to marry for the third time; he then married Jagadamba Devi. Of their two sons, Umapada died young, and Kamalakanta succeeded his illustrious father in propagating *Krishna Yātrā* for a long time.

As his fame spread beyond Burdwan and Navadwip, he was invited to Calcutta by such dignitaries as Maharaja Jatindramohan Thakur, and Chief Justice Ramesh Chandra Mitra, and was awarded a gold medal. Rabin-dranath Tagore was greatly impressed by his performance. Nevertheless, before he met Sri Ramakrishna, did he realize the worth of his work, the artifice of his cultural programmes, or their spiritual dimension?

Nilkantha, his mentor Govinda Adhikari, Motilal Roy, and other minstrels who used to perform in and around Burdwan, Purulia, Bankura, etc must have heard of the Paramahansa (as Sri Ramakrishna was then called). He was sometimes known as the 'guru' of the popular Brahmo leader and great orator Keshab Chandra Sen. Likewise it may be presumed that Sri Ramakrishna must have heard of Nilkantha when the latter started visiting Calcutta, or earlier still, dur-



Nilkantha Mukhopadhyaya

ing Sri Ramakrishna's annual visits to Kamar-pukur and Sihore. Nilkantha's desire was fulfilled when one morning, Sri Ramakrishna, Kaliprasad (Swami Abhedananda) and Latu (Swami Adbhutananda) left for Hatkhola in a hired cab. By the time they reached there, the performance had already begun. Sri Ramakrishna found it impossible to move towards the stage. However, as soon as Nilkantha heard that the Paramahansa had come, he rushed to receive him. Holding Sri Ramakrishna's hand and making way through the crowd, he arranged a seat for the latter close to the stage. He returned to the stage and continued to sing, 'Who created the three-lettered word *pirīti* (love).' The longing of Radha for her beloved sparkled even as he uttered *pirīti*. Sri Ramakrishna's lips began to quiver with emotion. Sri Ramakrishna occasionally improvised certain words in the song,⁵ which heightened the charm of Nilkantha's songs. Swami Abhedananda describes the situation:

When Nilkantha continued to repeat the song in a sweet voice and with great emo-

4. *Gospel*, p. 899.

5. Called *akhrā*, it is a poetic expression for expanding some idea of the song and sung in keeping with the song's tune.

Nilkantha's signature

tion, Paramahamsadeva stood up in ecstasy. How wonderful was his face! Nilkantha also in a rapturous mood touched the feet of Paramahamsadeva with both hands and went on taking the dust of his feet again and again. Some time after, when sense-consciousness returned, Paramahamsadeva sat down and kept on listening to the musical play. He then looked like an ordinary man.⁶

Nilkantha composed several songs on Mother Kali and Radha-Krishna as also on other deities. Of the seven musical dramas which he authored, five may be classed as *Krishna Yātrā*. Dr Biman Behari Mazumdar (in *Bangabasi*, Paṣ 1331 issue) has said: 'Today Nilkantha's influence on Bengal is spiritual in nature. Hundreds of persons sing and listen to his songs to nourish their religious life. ... Although Nilkantha was a performer of *Yātrā*, his songs touch the chords of the heart like Ramprasad's songs.'⁷

An appraisal of his spiritual status can be made from his encounter with Sri Ramakrishna. On that day Sri Ramakrishna, in the company of M. and Baburam, had attended Nilkantha's performance at Nabin Neogi's house. Though Sri Ramakrishna had already planned to attend the programme, Neogi also

invited him. Happy to meet Sri Ramakrishna, Nilkantha promised to pay a return visit to Sri Ramakrishna in the afternoon. This happened on 5 October 1884.

At 3 pm, Nilkantha came with five or six of his companions. Sri Ramakrishna went to the eastern door of his room to welcome them. Nilkantha and his companions reverentially bowed before him, touching the ground with their foreheads. At this, some divine thoughts flooded Sri Ramakrishna's being and he went into samadhi. The visitors were amazed to see this transformation. The room was soon filled with other devotees and employees of the temple. When Sri Ramakrishna became somewhat normal, he sat on a mat on the floor, surrounded by Nilkantha and others. Still in an ecstatic mood, he said, 'I am all right.' Nilkantha, in amazement, prayed with folded hands, 'Make me all right too.' In reply, Sri Ramakrishna observed that he was already all right. To drive home his point, Sri Ramakrishna said that by adding the letter *ā* to *kā*, one still gets *kā*. Those present burst into laughter.

Nilkantha, though a spiritual seeker, had various worldly entanglements. He pleaded for Sri Ramakrishna's blessings. Sri Ramakrishna's response was classic. Out of the eight fetters that bind a person to the world, God lets one or two remain so that the person could teach others. Besides, if Nilkantha renounced, what would happen to his companions? Nevertheless, the ever-sympathetic Sri Ramakrishna consoled Nilkantha, saying, 'God is now doing all these works through you. When they are finished, you will not return to them. The housewife finishes her household duties, feeds everyone, including the menservants and maidservants, and then goes to take her bath. She doesn't come back even if people shout for her.'

As Nilkantha continued to plead for his blessings, Sri Ramakrishna, keen observer that he was, assured him saying, 'Your eyes fill with tears when you utter the name of God. Why then do you worry about any-

6. Swami Abhedananda, *My Life-Story* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1970), pp. 45-6.

7. *Krishna Yatra*, p. 153.

thing? Divine love has grown in you.' Sri Ramakrishna hinted that Nilkantha might strive to attain the stage of a *vijnāni* so that he would be able to love God in various ways. Now, changing the topic, Sri Ramakrishna observed that he loved that song in which the devotee expresses his aspiration to reach the lotus feet of the Divine Mother. At the same time, he reminded Nilkantha that the latter must have a clear conviction that everything finally depended on God's grace.

After a pause, Sri Ramakrishna hinted that Nilkantha's songs there in his room would be but 'honorary'—they would bring no money for him. In the course of his talk Sri Ramakrishna explained that Ramprasad's songs appeal so much because he had attained God-realization. Ramakrishna loved Nilkantha's songs so much because he too had acquired several gems of spirituality. Sri Ramakrishna further observed, 'He alone is a true man whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened. That is why you are a true man.'⁸ He requested the musician to sing one or two songs about the Divine Mother.

Nilkantha sang the following two songs with his companions: (a) 'Living by the side of the river, he was desirous of attaining the lotus feet of Mother Shyāmā', and (b) 'During autumn comes down to earth the Divine Mother, the killer of the buffalo-demon' (*Ma-hiṣa-mardinī mātā śarate bhubane āśe*). The second song prompted Sri Ramakrishna to stand up and go into samadhi. A beatific smile lighted up his countenance with a glow of joy. As he came down to the plane of external consciousness, he began dancing in an ecstatic mood. Nilkantha and his companions sang and danced forming a circle around him. Nilkantha's third song, which was about Lord Siva, sent Ramakrishna to the height of ecstasy. When he came down from that



Sri Gauranga Mahaprabhu

height, he began to dance again with the others.

Later, Sri Ramakrishna requested Nilkantha to sing the song he had heard him sing in Calcutta.⁹ M. asked if he referred to the song about Sri Gauranga. Ramakrishna approved. Nilkantha sang, 'The beautiful Gauranga, the youthful dancer, fair as molten gold.'¹⁰ Sri Ramakrishna lost himself in divine love and sang again and again the line, 'Everything is swept away by the onrush of love,' and danced with Nilkantha and the other devotees. M., a witness to this episode, observed, 'It seemed as if Chaitanya himself was dancing with his companions.' Also Ma-

9. As mentioned earlier, in 1884, Sri Ramakrishna had been to Hatkhola to witness a performance by Nilkantha. M. was perhaps not present on that occasion. The question naturally arises whether Sri Ramakrishna had attended another programme in M.'s company, when both heard this song.

10. It is interesting to note that this song, composed by Nilkantha, was sung by a Vaishnava from Nilkantha's village at Dakshineswar on 23 December 1883 (see *Kathamrita*, p. 410).

8. M., *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Bengali), (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1988), p. 631. [Hereafter *Kathamrita*.]



M., the recorder of the Master's words

nomohan, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, was transported to ecstasy. M. felt that Sri Ramakrishna's room had turned into the courtyard of Srivasa of *Chaitanyalila* fame.

These four songs by Nilkantha were followed by Sri Ramakrishna's solo song about Gauranga and Nityananda. The festive atmosphere reached its peak when Sri Ramakrishna improvised the line, 'Behold, the two brothers have come, who are mad with the love of Radha,' while dancing vigorously with Nilkantha and the other devotees. Hearing the loud music many people gathered around the room and passengers travelling by in boats were attracted by the songs.

The music over, Sri Ramakrishna sat in the company of Nilkantha and the other devotees on the semicircular porch to the west of his room. Bathed by the soothing light of the autumn moon, Sri Ramakrishna engaged in intimate conversation with Nilkantha. Here is a portion of the conversation as reported by M.:

Nilkantha: 'You are none other than Gauranga.'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Why should you say such a thing? I am the servant of all. The waves belong to the Ganges; but does the

Ganges belong to the waves?'

Nilkantha: 'You may say whatever you like, but we regard you as Gauranga himself.'

Sri Ramakrishna (tenderly, in an ecstatic mood): 'My dear sir, I try to seek my "I" but I do not find it. ...'

Nilkantha: 'What shall I say, sir? Please be gracious to us.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): 'You are ferrying many people across the ocean of the world. How many hearts are illumined by hearing your music!'

Nilkantha: 'You talk of ferrying. But bless me that I may not be drowned in the ocean myself.'

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): 'If you get drowned, it will be in the Sea of Immortality.'¹¹

As Nilkantha gave a 'little extra' by presenting a few songs free of charge, Sri Ramakrishna also gave him something 'extra' which he did not expect. Being delighted with Nilkantha's company, Sri Ramakrishna finally entertained him with the song, 'When the Blissful Mother comes to my house, how much of the *Chandi* I shall hear!'

At the close of the session, Sri Ramakrishna laughingly remarked, 'I feel very much like laughing. Just fancy, I am singing for these musicians!' Nilkantha's repartee was equally, if not more, touching. He said, 'We go about singing, but today we have had our true reward.'

It has been assumed that they did not meet more than twice. Circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that there was perhaps one more meeting. The *Gospel* mentions that on 9 September 1883 Ratan, the steward of Jadu Mallick's garden-house, invited Sri Ramakrishna to a *yātrā* performance by Nilkantha, to be held in Jadu Mallick's house in Calcutta. Its date had been set. Sri Ramakrishna expressed his desire to see the *yātrā* and thought of spending that night in Cal-

11. *Gospel*, p. 600.

cutta in order to hear him.¹² Sri Ramakrishna must have attended this programme. On this occasion both Sri Ramakrishna and M. seem to have heard Nilkantha singing 'The beautiful Gauranga, the youthful dancer...' This meeting between Sri Ramakrishna and Nilkantha must have been the first one.

In this connection it is worthwhile to recall a statement of Sri Sarada Devi. While in Varanasi, Sri Sarada Devi one day sang a song of Nilkantha to illustrate loving devotion, particularly of the *gopīs* of Vrindaban and observed, 'Ah, how excellent is this song of Nilkantha! The Master liked it immensely. While the Master was at Dakshineswar, Nilkantha would come to him now and then and sing songs. How blissful it was!'¹³

Sri Ramakrishna's influence worked imperceptibly and brought about changes in Nilkantha's personality and outlook. A few incidents may be mentioned to illustrate this. Maharajkumar of Hetampur repeatedly requested Nilkantha to narrate his life story. An extremely hesitant Nilkantha submitted, 'By reading my life story what benefit are the readers likely to accrue? Besides, whenever one narrates one's own story the desire for name and fame casts its shadow.' In 1910 (1317 BY), he had gone on a tour to Varanasi, Gaya and Vrindaban. At Vrindaban his younger brother had a viral fever to which he succumbed. This bereavement wrought havoc on his mind. On his return to Dhabani he kept himself free from any further performances for quite some time.

Noticing his health problems due to advancing age, his son Kamalakanta one day requested him to retire. To this he firmly said, 'Please do not say no to my singing the glory of Lord Hari for the remaining few days of my life.'¹⁴ One can see the influence of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings here.

When Nilkantha predicted that he would give up his body at the holy Triveni river, no one took him seriously. Yet, on 18 Śrāvaṇ 1318 BY, as soon as he could foresee his last moment approaching, he left for Triveni. More than 200 villagers of Dhabani and adjoining villages accompanied him for a long distance, singing *kīrtan*, to bid him adieu. The next morning at 8 am he asked his son to place him on the bank of the river in observance of the sacred custom called *gangānjali*. The previous evening he had composed his last song, the first line of which reads, 'Is death a fear when I am no more confined to "myness"?' At his behest his son Kamalakanta sang this to the accompaniment of *khol*, harmonium, cymbals, etc with tears rolling down his cheeks. Thousands of his admirers stood on the river bank beside him. In their presence he breathed his last at 10 am. It was 20 Śrāvaṇ 1318 (1911). He was 69 years and 7 months old then.

Besides having attained a high spiritual state, Nilkantha made a great impact on society. Bejoy Krishna Goswami observed, 'Nilkantha's songs have been a great benefit to society. Many atheists have turned into believers of God.'¹⁵ And Sri Ramakrishna had told him, 'God has kept you in the world for the sake of others. ... How many people are being benefited by seeing your bhakti!'¹⁶

Nilkantha was a born poet and musician—two in one. Devotion was manifested in him spontaneously: it became his second nature. But Sri Ramakrishna's touch helped him manifest love and faith in God even more; it deepened his spiritual experiences, and not only brought amazing fulfilment in his life but made him an effective vehicle for helping to carry out the grand mission which the Divine Mother had entrusted Sri Ramakrishna with. □

12. *Gospel*, p. 284.

13. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1984), p. 359.

14. *Krishna Yatra*, p. 147.

15. *Krishna Yatra*, p. 141.

16. *Gospel*, p. 598.

Chinese Buddhism and Vedanta - IV

DR ALAN HUNTER

(continued from the previous issue)

Humanitarian Buddhism

The importance, or otherwise, of humanitarian work has long been a topic of debate in Chinese Buddhism. From early times, Buddhist lay people were instructed to behave ethically, and more specifically to gain 'merit' (Chinese *gongde*) by contributing to religious projects, for example by donations for buildings or publications. Chinese lay believers are often extraordinarily generous, and the great Buddhist establishments have flourished through public support. Most Chinese Buddhist schools teach that good actions will bear fruit: even those performed without any religious motivation will eventually lead one to hear the dharma and engage in spiritual practice, while contributions to religious institutions might counter-balance one's accumulated negative karma. In the case of the Pure Land, another karmic factor is the power of the Buddhas to transfer their own mighty merit to humble practitioners:

The invocation of Kuan-Yin's [a female form of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara] name forms another cause which will right away offset the previous karma.... The law of cause and effect still stands good. All that has happened is that a powerful and immensely good karma has overshadowed the weaker one.¹

Despite interest in karma, as far as I am aware the Chinese Buddhists failed to de-

velop an overall philosophy of 'karma yoga' before the twentieth century. Indeed, many critics of Buddhism claimed that the concept of 'merit' was a kind of self-serving trick perpetrated by monks on the ignorant laity: lay believers should give generously to support the monastic life of meditation; monks should be free from all onerous duties (like work) so they can concentrate on spiritual practices. This could easily lead to corruption and degeneration, and indeed it was a common joke in Chinese society that feckless idlers became monks to avoid the trouble of working and raising a family.

However, in the twentieth century a major new stream of Chinese Buddhism emerged, usually known as 'humanitarian Buddhism' (Chinese *renjian fojiao*), whose founder was the great monk Tai Xu (1890-1947). Tai Xu was an ardent Buddhist who, as a young man, observed that his religion was under threat from several quarters. First, Christian missionaries (mostly British or North American) offered much that Buddhists could not, like access to Western education and medical services, as well as the prestige of Western customs and affiliations. Second, China was undergoing social upheaval, with disruption of traditional religious and family values. Third, modernizers in the Chinese elite exerted administrative pressures on religious groups, for example confiscating monastic land for farming, and buildings for schools or even for garrisons. Finally, Buddhism was beginning to seem old-fashioned and anachronistic. Its claims to be 'compassionate' were wearing thin when the populace could see much better social work being carried out by Christians, by local associations of various kinds, and by young but

1. Tech Eng Soon, 'Lecture on Kuan-Yin', undated pamphlet c. 1960 (Penang Buddhist Association). Cited in the Introduction (anonymous) to Yin Kuang, *Pure Land Zen*, trans. Master Thiech Thien Tam (Singapore: Amitabha Buddhist Society, 1993), at p. 12.

enthusiastic state agencies.

Tai Xu and the handful of young, reformist monks who supported him addressed these issues on a range of fronts. They set up modern seminaries where monks learned secular knowledge as well as Buddhist scriptures. They updated texts into more modern forms of Chinese, improved editorial skills, and made new efforts in publication and dissemination. Buddhists became actively engaged in philanthropic activities such as clinics and orphanages, and ran evangelistic programmes, for example in prisons. Monks were increasingly involved in manual labour. One street chapel run by Tai Xu himself in the city of Hankou seemed to owe as much to the style of a Christian church as a Buddhist temple, using organ music and visual effects (a brilliantly-lit display of relics surrounded by mirrors) to attract a congregation.

Another notable characteristic was Tai Xu's interest in the world outside China, which contrasted with the generally insular attitude of Chinese Buddhists (and China itself) from the end of the fourteenth century until the early twentieth century. He set up a 'world' Buddhist Association (*Shijie Fojiao Lianhehui*), possibly the first of its kind, organized study exchanges with monks from Sri Lanka, and sent several monks overseas for study and mission work. He himself set off on a nine-month world tour in August 1928, visiting Europe, the United States, and Japan. He was the first high-ranking Buddhist monk to visit some major cities, and his visits stimulated the formation of Buddhist groups in Paris, London, Berlin, Singapore and elsewhere² (most of these initiatives failed to maintain their connection with China, but some of them, like *Les Amis du Bouddhisme* in Paris, led a successful independent existence).

Following Tai Xu, the most illustrious monk to emerge from this environment was Master Hsing Yun. Born in 1927, Hsing Yun was ordained as a monk at age twelve and served briefly as abbot of Huazang monastery in Nanjing. He fled China for Taiwan in 1949. It is known that many of his teachers worked with Tai Xu, and that Hsing Yun himself had studied Tai Xu's works. (Hsing Yun is himself credited by some with coining the term 'humanitarian Buddhism', although he refers it back to Tai Xu, stating that he wants to continue 'the humanitarian Buddhism of Tai Xu'. In either case, the term is now widely used in both mainland China and Taiwan.)

After moving to Taiwan, Hsing Yun, who started out with no resources whatever, founded what must be by now the largest Buddhist association in the world; and this despite considerable opposition from conservative monks, who disagreed with the doctrinal emphasis, and, at times, from the Taiwanese state. The main monastery, near Kaohsiung in southern Taiwan, is called Fokuangshan (Buddha's Light Mountain), which now has over a thousand monastics (male and female); its lay associations are the Buddha's Light International Association and International Buddhist Progress Society. They have over a million members in Taiwan alone, and numerous branch temples around the world. They conduct a variety of educational, charitable, cultural, and social programmes as well as propagate Buddhism. Contemporary 'humanitarian Buddhism' stresses the involvement of the sangha in secular affairs for the good of humanity, and maximum participation of the laity in the affairs of the monasteries. The emphasis is on the application of Buddhist principles, like compassion, to everyday life.

Due largely to Hsing Yun, and more generally to an innovative generation of monks, Buddhism in Taiwan is flourishing, not only spiritually, but in practical ways. Fokuangshan runs a children's home, a senior citizens' home, several hospices, a cemetery, and even

2. Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), is the best English-language study of the period. Chapter Three focuses on Tai Xu's life and works.

an organ donors' bank. Other Buddhist groups run disaster relief, educational, and environmental programmes. Several features of this contemporary form of Chinese Buddhism are worth noting. One is that most of the activities are carried out by volunteers, lay people who devote their spare time to charitable works. This fact is in itself a remarkable breakthrough since the concept of volunteering was almost unknown in China until very recently. Also, Hsing Yun felt it was a mistake for Buddhist monks to look down on matters such as raising a family, love between spouses, or contributing to society. Nor should they feel themselves superior to lay devotees. Instead, monks should on the one hand maintain a very high standard of monastic discipline and spiritual training, while at the same time be vigorously engaged in work for the good of society; in both cases, there should be maximum co-operation with the laity. This surely shows the way forward for Chinese Buddhism into the twenty-first century.³

Chinese Buddhism and Vivekananda's Four Yogas

What is the relevance of this long discussion to the topic we have chosen, 'Chinese Buddhism and Vedanta'? I hope that cross-cultural reflection may possibly add a little to our understanding of both traditions; since I am not a specialist in Vedanta, I will confine myself to general observations, which can doubtless be refined or challenged by those more expert. The point of comparison is spe-

cifically with the concept of 'four yogas', namely *jnana*, *bhakti*, *raja* and *karma*, expounded by Swami Vivekananda. According to Swami Vivekananda, a practitioner should be adept at discriminative knowledge or philosophy based on revealed scriptures; at devotional practices; at meditative and esoteric techniques; and at humanitarian service in the spirit of the worship of God in humanity. Competence in all, rather than a limited focus on one or two, is proposed as the best path to spiritual development. There are admittedly some grey areas in the concept and the comparison. For example, meditation on a Chosen Ideal, *ishta*, is part of *bhakti yoga*; but, as far as I understand, the *ishta* could also be the object of concentration in *raja yoga*, or, if it were a tantric deity, part of a tantric path. Similar overlap may be found in Chinese schools. Another point is that certain practices to be found in the Ramakrishna movement, for example propitiation of *sakti* in the *Durga puja*, are in fact of tantric origin, but are not explicitly mentioned in the 'four yogas'.

But there is surely valid comparison to be made overall between neo-Vedanta and the four trends in Chinese Buddhism I have highlighted: direct illumination, devotion, esotericism, and humanitarianism. Serious Chinese Buddhist devotees would be encouraged to practise most if not all of them. A young monk was traditionally expected to travel around China, or even further afield, in search of teachers and wisdom: one of the monasteries' important functions was to host wandering monks (they operated a sophisticated system of introductory letters and registration, to curtail abuse of hospitality by criminals and vagabonds). Even within a single monastery, monks might engage with different traditions, for example practising Pure Land for most of the year, but attending Chan or tantric retreats from time to time. In contemporary Taiwan, Hsing Yun's Fokuangshan explicitly teaches all these forms of practice including, as mentioned, humanitarian work.

3. More about Hsing Yun can be found in the publication of Fokuangshan and affiliated organizations. He has written an autobiography, *Venerable Master Hsing Yun, Perfectly Willing* (California: Hsi Lai University Press, 1994). A study based on recent fieldwork is Henry Clough, *How has Fokuangshan been Influenced by the Ideas of the Buddhist Revival in Mainland China?* Unpublished dissertation (University of Leeds: Department of East Asian Studies, 1997).

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

How are we to reach the state of dhyāna?

Sincere and sustained effort is the secret. Consistent practice deepens meditation. *Bhāva* grows through the cultivation of *bhāva*. As is the intensity of your feeling or *bhāva* so is your gain.

Can we practise meditation at any hour?

Some preparation precedes *dhyāna*. We climb a flight of stairs to get to the roof, is it not? We generally confuse *dhyāna* with *dhāraṇā*. When we become adepts in *dhāraṇā* we shall be able to practise *dhyāna*; and the state of perfection in *dhyāna* is reached when no contrary *vṛtti* can rise in the mind other than the one on which you concentrate your mind. This state is called *samāpatti* by Patanjali [*Yoga Sūtras*, 1.47]; but let me use the generally known term *samādhi*. If you go to a master of Indian classical music to learn from him, he will first of all advise you to practise the basic notes, *sa-re-ga-ma...*, for a long time. Some students will lose patience and give up; some others express their exasperation at such boring training. However, that adept, or *ustād* as they call him, knows fully well that no one will be able to sing properly unless he or she becomes thoroughly grounded in the basics. Without perfecting the basics, without knowing the meaning of the fundamentals of yoga, like *yama*, *niyama*, etc, how can you dream of being an adept in meditation?

Will it be meditation even if it is prac-

tised for just about five minutes?

We call such practise *dhāraṇā* and not contemplation. If *dhāraṇā* becomes intense and perfect, it becomes *dhyāna* or contemplation. The important factor is intensity and not duration. While you are still groping in the dark to achieve mental control, is giving five minutes to concentrating the mind enough? One idea comes to the mind's surface and goes. Next, another rises up. This process is quick and endless. Ordinarily, we see and hear, and both functions appear simultaneous. Psychology says that the faculties of vision and hearing are simultaneously active. But actually this is not so. They appear to be functioning simultaneously only because of the incredible rapidity of mental function—the quickness of arising of *vṛttis*. To control *vṛttis* is the goal.

Does dhyāna mean uninterrupted flow of thoughts?

Dhyāna is the elimination of all unhomogenous or *vijātiya* thoughts from the mind and entertaining only homogeneous ones. When the mind is rid of distracting *vṛttis*, only the homogeneous ones flow continuously. '*Dhyānena vijātiya-pratyayāntaritena sajātiya-pratyaya-pravāhena śravaṇa-manana phalabhūtena-ātmacintanena...*' The flow of desired *vṛttis* to the exclusion of all undesirable ones and constant thought of the Atman is *dhyāna*, says Madhusudana Saraswati in his *Gūḍhārtha-dīpikā* [commentary on the *Bha-*

gavadgītā, verse 13.24].

How to meditate on the Atman?

That which pervades your whole being is the Atman. It is that luminous spiritual principle which is the same everywhere. Discriminate and find out what that all-pervading principle within you is. That itself is meditation on the Self.

Maharaj, is thinking of God's divine sport (līlā) also meditation?

Meditating on divine sport (*līlā*) will lessen distracting thoughts. Vaishnava scriptures speak of several types of meditation: *sevādhyaṇa*, *kṛīḍādhyaṇa*, *guṇādhyaṇa*, etc. The main point is to stop the innumerable *vṛttis* from rising in your mind and making the mind one-pointed.

On occasion, the mind does not work during meditation; it becomes dull and lethargic. What are we to do then?

When this happens, the mind has to be 'awakened'. To do this, if necessary, get up and walk for some time; sprinkle cold water on your face; or use some other useful technique to avoid sleeping during meditation.

In spite of our meditation, japa, etc, the mind is drawn towards temptations. What shall we do?

While walking, what will you do if you fall? Will you be lying there or get up and go forward? If you fall, rise again. The toddler falls down while walking and rises again. Only try to be cautious against further mishaps.

Is there any relation between work (karma) and meditation (dhyāna)?

Action or work or karma is physical, while meditation is mental. Now, actions are controlled by the mind. So there can be no work without thinking; at the same time, there can be no thinking without work. You should have an ideal for performing both. Let us take the case of worship: one person is just

pouring flowers at God's feet while the other is worshipping with his whole mind. The work is the same, but there is a world of difference between the two. You can see the importance of the mind here. There is a prayer, 'Whatever I do, O Mother, is your worship.' Such an attitude has to be cultivated with effort. First imagination, then realization. All actions, done with intense concentration, will become worship. Japa, meditation, etc, are all like a child's playing with toys. Once the soul becomes involved, these toys become unnecessary.

If the fruits of our spiritual practice are offered to God, do we gain anything from them?

You may not! But you must have *faith*. Remember this anecdote: Having faith in something Vibhishana had written on a slip of paper and given him, a person was walking over the waters easily. Midway, he was curious to know what Vibhishana had indeed written. He saw the slip: only 'Rama' was written there. 'Is this all?' he thought and the next moment he was drowned. As long as he had faith, he could walk on the sea.

Can everyone come down from samadhi?

These days we all speak of samadhi. Reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and some other books, everyone has added such terms to his or her vocabulary. We use the term samadhi so casually; but it is not at all easy, and there are many stages of samadhi. Sri Ramakrishna says that an avatar can come down from *nirvikalpa samādhi* and not others.

We hear so many good things. How to use them properly in life?

Chew the cud! Do you know what chewing the cud is? This 'chewing the cud' or mulling over good thoughts is called *smaraṇa-manana*.

—compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

Now or never—make that your motto. 'Even in this life I must see God.'

Swami Turiyananda

Vivekananda the Man

As Reflected in His Epistles

PROF B. N. SIKDAR

(continued from the previous issue)

EIGHT

Lots of harsh criticism of the American's ways lie scattered in these correspondences. 'Men will visit their wives' parents ten times, but rarely go to their own parents. ... The husbands of this country are slaves of their wives,' Vivekananda once wrote to Manmathanath Bhattacharya.⁴⁹

By the way, the same letter sheds one curious beam on this man when we read it between the lines: 'The women in America are very sentimental and have a mania for romance. I am, however, a strange sort of animal who hasn't any romantic feeling, and therefore they could not sustain any such feeling toward me and they show me great respect. I make all of them call me "father" or "brother". I don't allow them to come near me with any other feeling, and gradually they have all been straightened out....'⁵⁰ Quite natural. This 'Hindu Monk of India' radiated bodily vigour or magnetism, but was not a man to be taken in by the shape of a face or the curve of a jaw. 'Oh, they are so dry—even girls talk dry metaphysics. Here is like our Benares where all is dry.'⁵¹

Despite a harsh exterior, people who penetrated the outer shell found him amiable and affectionate. His compassion extended to dumb creatures.⁵² He did favours to friends and compatriots through all his days. Often

the pettiness of people and the frailty of life brought out of him pensive, sombre thought. It seems Vivekananda could 'laugh and frown' at the same time as the old saying goes. Sometimes sarcastic and devastating, he possessed a fund of genuine, sunny humour:

(a) So he calls himself a mental healer of metaphysico - chemico - physico - religiosio what not!⁵³

(b) Those emaciated Western women, looking like old dried-up fruit...⁵⁴

(c) Say, you 24 feet and 600 lbs. of Christian Science, you could not pull me up with your treatments.⁵⁵

(d) Alas, Nick Bottom, would you then be thus translated?⁵⁶

It is a bitter sort of humour, or sarcasm, which seethe us:

(a) The only respect the Buddhists pay to their great tenet of non-killing is by opening 'butcher-stalls' in every place!⁵⁷

(b) And what great things they have been doing!—'If a potato happens to touch a brinjal, how long will the universe last before it is deluged?'⁵⁸

(c) The people of this Christian land will recognize religion if only you can cure diseases, work miracles, and open up avenues to money; and they understand little of any-

49. *Complete Works*, 7.XXIII.473.

50. *Complete Works*, 7.XXIII.474.

51. *Complete Works*, 9.XX.22; to Mrs G.W. Hale.

52. 'Kindly look after the goat a bit,' *Complete Works*, 5.CXIX.178.

53. *Complete Works*, 6.XLIV.260.

54. *Complete Works*, 7.XXIII.474; to M. Bhattacharya.

55. *Complete Works*, 8.CXLIII.473.

56. *Complete Works*, 7.XXXII.497.

57. *Complete Works*, 7.XXXIX.506.

58. *Complete Works*, 6.LXXI.318.

thing else.⁵⁹

(d) The Swiss is a Tartar *minus* a pigtail....⁶⁰

There are scores and scores of words, expressions, phrases, which enliven many of Vivekananda's serious disquisitions. Indeed, Vivekanandian sense of humour is so various as to deserve a separate article. His vision of the world included the comic, though the reformer-cum-patriot in him led him to devise varied instruments of moral lashing in order to force the pace of work and thought at a time that needed rather strong speech to shake it into awareness of duties to do, and swiftly. Vivekananda was out of his time in a world where the laws had lost their reality, the synthesis of knowledge and faith had lost its validity; under his feet he felt the great land slip.

The generous side of Vivekananda is perhaps best seen when his laughing does not spare himself:

(a) Sometimes I wonder whether my face has turned white, but the mirror tells the truth.⁶¹

(b) That written in the letter [N] is an abbreviation, the full name being Narendra meaning the 'Chief of men'...very ludicrous, isn't it?⁶²

The overflow of the man's less serious moods need be searched for a hidden truth as the He-Ancient in Shaw advises (*Back to Methuselah*; Act V). His more caustic jibes present a wry picture of little men, exposing their puniness. The achievement of his fraternity even when estimable, to him seemed inadequate. Such an explosive force as Vivekananda would not be always expected to work in harmony with others of a slow and halting pace (as it appeared to him).

NINE

One of the great metaphysical discover-

ies of the New Critics has become a platitude: 'man's radically mixed, his good and evil being.' Vivekananda's rectitude and austere view of life did not betoken any deficiency in the emotional side. On the contrary, his was indeed a sentimental nature—a fact of which he was quite conscious. 'I am a very soft-natured man in spite of the stern Vedantic views I hold. And this proves to be my undoing. At the slightest touch I give myself away....'⁶³ Once he burst out humming in one letter: 'Ay, *sake*, fill up the cup and we will be mad.'⁶⁴

A sensuous appreciation was not actually *summa felicitas* for Vivekananda, yet he had an eye for natural beauties which came his way in India, England, France, Japan and the USA; an eye for the tulips, the bluebells, the rhododendrons, the pine straining against a storm; for the snow-capped range, the undulating lake, the rising and falling sea, the sun pink in the western horizon, or whatever beauty met his gaze while he promenaded or journeyed. Characteristically, it seems, his eye beamed more on the distant and the far-off; more above his head than at his feet.

(a) As I am writing to you, before me, reflecting the afternoon's flow, stand long, long lines of huge snow peaks.⁶⁵

(b) Plenty of gardens, fields, orchards, and large forests, all in her [Mrs Sevier's] land.⁶⁶

(c) It is a lovely summer place, this Cedar Lawn of the Guernseys. Miss Guernsey has gone on a visit to Swampscott. I had also an invitation there, but I thought [it] better to stay here in the calm and silent place full of trees and with the beautiful Hudson flowing by and mountain in the background.⁶⁷ He called music 'the highest art, and to those who understand, is the highest worship.'⁶⁸

63. *Complete Works*, 6.XXV.229. See also 6.XLI.251.

64. *Complete Works*, 6.CII.367.

65. *Complete Works*, 8.XCIV.404.

66. *Complete Works*, 5.LXXIII.125.

67. *Complete Works*, 9.XXIV.26; to Mrs G.W. Hale.

68. *Complete Works*, 5.LXXIII.125.

59. *Complete Works*, 6.XLVII.271.

60. *Complete Works*, 8.LXXVIII.380.

61. *Complete Works*, 6.LXXXI.344; to Mrs F.H. Leggett from England.

62. *Complete Works*, 8.XVIII.304.

The hard, complex mission of his life precluded his ever being more than a part-time explorer of the natural. All great minds of the past found inspiration in elevated places. Petrarch ascended Mont Ventoux before he completed recording a soul's journey. While riding Vivekananda seemed to hear the beat of fairy horses' hooves on fairy hills. A warrior and a patriot, the monk was jingoistic insofar as his life's mission was concerned. In youth he most disliked the haughty way of the Englishmen; later this original but superficial dislike was softened into some sort of admiration for the imperial races. Their directness, loyalty to their country, sincerity, and commonsense did not escape Vivekananda's perceptive and discerning mind.

There are several consolatory letters which also bear evidence to the softness ingrained in his character. We cite two instances: to Pramadadas Mitra from Almora in May 1897⁶⁹ and to Mrs. Ole Bull from Brooklyn in January 1895.⁷⁰ The first was prompted by 'some unavoidable domestic grief,' the second by the loss of the recipient's father. In both of the communications, Vivekananda, true to his own self, seizes the chance to elucidate his notions of liberation, the *Gita*, and the caste system.

TEN

The year 1899 (loosely speaking) marks a breakthrough in the tragic tale of Swamiji's life, which reads like a Jacobean tragedy. Since about the end of 1895 he had been speaking of the severe strain his work imposed.⁷¹ In 1898 he writes, 'Poor man, he [Dr Barrows] little knew I was at death's door then.'⁷² This *then* refers to Vivekananda's arrival in Madras from overseas via Colombo. Heredity made him allergic to heat, it was too hot for him in the Deccan, and he had been

long in cold countries. Yet he voluntarily (also valiantly) stood 'the feting and feasting and pumping all the work out of me.'⁷³ 'Total collapse and extreme prostration followed'; the monk had to leave Madras for cooler north. Later a trip to Baidyanath (Deoghar) was not of any avail, rather it worsened his physical fitness: 'I nearly died there.'⁷⁴

Back in the USA and working at the mill, Vivekananda falls to exploring 'the quick forge and working-house of thought.' The state of mind is better illustrated through short extracts:

(a) I have suffered mentally and physically all my life, but Mother's kindness has been immense.⁷⁵

(b) Do not work yourself out. It is no use; always remember—'Duty is the midday sun whose fierce rays are burning the very vitals of humanity.' It is necessary for a time as a discipline; beyond that, it is a morbid dream.⁷⁶

Is it the same spirit, we wonder, who, scarcely five years before, like an astronaut strode to the launch pad in the Hall of Columbus, filled with hope (also a little unsure) ready to fly to the moon and beyond? He thenceforth for a while seemed a jet before the age of jets.

We read with amazement and infinite pity how this giant of a man suffered a slow and anguished death. 'You need not be alarmed with me,' he wrote in September 1899 to Mary Hale, 'as the disease will take two or three years at worst to carry me off.'⁷⁷ The hero is making light of his misery, although he has felt Death hovering by. A weak heart, a dysfunctioning liver, and pancreatic disorder are a killer combination. Webster

69. *Complete Works*, 6.CXXIV.392.

70. *Complete Works*, 5.XXXI.68.

71. To Mary Hale from Belur Math, dated 2 March 1898.

72. *Complete Works*, 8.CXXIII.446.

73. *Complete Works*, 8.CXXIII.446.

74. *Complete Works*, 5.XC.148.

75. *Complete Works*, 5.XC.149.

76. *Complete Works*, 6.CXLIII.417; letter to Margot from Kashmir in August 1898.

77. *Complete Works*, 8.CXXIII.446; letter to Mary Hale dated 2 March 1898.

put into his play-finales some lines about death so touching as to be tremendous:

I have caught
An everlasting cold. I have lost
my voice

Most irrecoverably.

Now forced to subside into retirement our man takes to searching the real purpose and meaning of human existence. The affairs of gods as a spectacle look disgustingly absurd: 'If in *this hell of a world* one can bring a little joy and peace even for a day into the heart of a single person, that much alone is true; this I have learnt after suffering all my life; *all else is mere moonshine...*'⁷⁸

Frequently in the epistles of the last phase crop up Sri Ramakrishna and more often 'Mother'; *Mother knows; Mother works; Mother does good to others* through me—occur with a refrain-like regularity. His health broke down long ago, and so long Vivekananda's will power and inner vitality had kept him ticking. Now the recuperative powers started waning fast. His 'health continued to be bad for three days at a stretch'; in April 1900 he wrote to 'an American friend' while at San Francisco, echoing Lord Tennyson's elegy 'Crossing the Bar': 'My boat is nearing the calm harbour from which it is never more to be driven out. Glory, glory unto Mother!'⁷⁹ To Mary Hale, in July 1901 he said, 'My letter had to be short; I am out of sorts all the time; it is the body!'⁸⁰ For quite some time, this man of action fell to exploring the gem-box of memories. Yet all the time he was hardly convinced that the forced change to a life of contemplative invalidism—mere survival—was ideal life. Hope and scepticism were fighting for the mastery of Vivekananda's spirit:

Through good and evil, pain and pleasure,
my life-boat has been dragged on. The one

great lesson I was taught is that life is misery, nothing but misery. Mother knows what is best. Each one of us is in the hands of Karma; it works itself out—and no nay....⁸¹

A young English poet—he died at the age of 26—lamented likewise (John Keats in 'Ode to a Nightingale'):

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey
hairs,

Where youth grows pale, and spectre-
thin, and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of
sorrow

And leaden-eyed despairs.

Another poet before he died at 36 also thought (Lord Byron in 'Youth and Age'):

'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek
the blush alone which fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone,
ere youth itself be past.

ELEVEN

On 17 January 1900, he writes to Mary Hale in this tune: 'I have worked for this world, Mary, all my life, and it does not give me a piece of bread without taking a pound of flesh. ... May the Lord take me to the other shore! Amen!'⁸² A week later, he informs her that he is 'determined to get rid of all sentimentalism, and emotionalism.... I am the Advaitist; our goal is *knowledge*—no feelings, no love, as all that belongs to matter and superstition and bondage. I am only existence and knowledge.'⁸³ Four months earlier (28 March 1900) 'Well Blessed Mary' heard from Vivekananda thus: 'My passing through the valley of death, physical, mental, *last two years*, has helped me in this. Now I am nearing that *Peace*, the eternal silence.'⁸⁴ Death, it seems, is no affliction but a boon to this famished, long-

81. *Complete Works*, 5.LXXXVII.143-4.

82. *Complete Works*, 8.CLXXI.524-5.

83. *Complete Works*, V; italics added.

84. *Complete Works*, 8.CLXV.504; italics added. See also p. 505, 'I am Peace that passeth understanding....'

78. *Complete Works*, 5.CXVIII.177; letter dated 18 February 1902; italics added.

79. *Complete Works*, 8.CLXXII.513.

80. *Complete Works*, 5.CVIII.166; see postscript.

suffering spirit, who it was time, 'to be scrapped, to be remanufactured.' Death, however, is not a matter of volition, and eminence did never bring immunity. Hence the Puranic myth of the sexless Great Being, who by a supreme act of will divided itself/herself/himself in two. To me that story looks like an allegorization of the gynaeco-centric theory of modern science. It was in a late stage of evolution that bisexual reproduction is seen. The primitive amoebae can divide themselves without sex. 'No more effort on roads full of obstacles, now it is the bed prepared with birds' down....'⁸⁵ Inwardly Vivekananda has been asking the same question as Milton—what 'brought death into the world and our woe?'; each answered in a way characteristic of the heritage of each. The Christian poet said it was a punishment for transgressing divine law; the disciple of Ramakrishna found the answer in Advaita lore. Ultimately in both cases hope won, not despair. It reminds us of the Jesuit priest who refused to possess his soul in 'carrion comfort' and what Shakespeare said more than 475 years ago:

They have tied me to a stake;
I cannot fly
But bear-like I must fight the course.
(*Macbeth*)

TWELVE

By virtue of the epistles' (1899–1902) quick alternation between melancholy, animation, and disillusionment, and 'the wonder which is broken knowledge,' Vivekananda attains the stature of a tragic hero out of the medley of emotions. Rising and falling comes to our ears a voice of calm assurance: 'A great idea of quiet has come upon me. I am

going to retire for good—no more work for me. If possible, I will revert to my old days of begging....'⁸⁶ Death was less than fifty days away. Meanwhile, he had transferred the ownership of the land and temple at Belur to a trustee board and this made the Ramakrishna Math a national asset. He could fairly be well-satisfied with his achievement. In Dekker (a Jacobean) we hear Bellefront say to Mattheo—

'Tis time to leave off jesting,
I had almost
Jested away salvation.

(*Honest Whore*, Part I, III.3)

Vivekananda's mind saw 'the traffic of Jacob's ladder' pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross. While we go through these six hundred epistles, we are ever in the presence of a noble mind. That is the reward of our labour.

THIRTEEN

Finally, one more quote, this time from an eminent writer-thinker—one who died in the fullness of years:

Reverence is often no more than conventional homage we pay to things in which we are not willing to take an active interest. The best homage we can pay to the great figures of the past, Dante, Titian, Shakespeare, Spinoza, is to treat them not with reverence but the familiarity we should exercise as if they were our contemporaries. Thus we pay them the highest complement we can; our familiarity acknowledges that they are alive for us (S. Maugham).

That alone can be my apology for my monstrous presumptuousness in trying to sound the Pacific. □

85. *Complete Works*, 8.CXC.V.538; to Sister Christine.

86. *Complete Works*, 5.CXXII.179-80; to 'Dear Joe' from Belur Math in May 1902.

Remember, this life is for the strong, the persevering; the weak go to the wall.

—Swami Turiyananda

Ministering Angels in Orissa



*A shattered man weeping over
what used to be his home*



*Coconut groves laid waste
by 260-kmph winds*



Ramakrishna Mission Arrives



A stricken populace waiting for relief



Monks distributing provisions

A Living Commentary

SWAMI ATMASHRADDHANANDA

'Neglect not the gift that is in thee,' writes Apostle Paul to Timothy (I Timothy, 4.14). In this article, Swami Atmashraddhananda from Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore, says why that 'inner gift' is not to be neglected. The anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna's nativity falls on the 8th of this month.

'What the whole Hindu race has thought in ages,' Swami Vivekananda wrote to one of his brother disciples, 'he (Sri Ramakrishna) lived in one life. His life is the living commentary to the Vedas of all nations.'¹ With the passage of time the uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna's life is becoming unquestionably evident. His words carry a special ring of authenticity about them, for they spring from his personal experience. His encounter with spiritual truths and laws governing the spiritual destiny of human beings makes his message immortal and lends an unfading charm and appeal to it. He lived what he taught. He had not only 'seen' or 'heard of milk' but had also tasted and assimilated it. His life was a burning flame of spirituality.

Swami Vivekananda called Sri Ramakrishna a 'living commentary.' A commentary is generally verbal or written, meant to serve as an aid to understanding explicitly what has been stated rather implicitly. It tends to interpret or revalidate what is either unclear or misunderstood. All great acharyas—Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva and others—have written elaborate commentaries on various scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna hardly knew how to read and write. He lived in his own life what the scriptures taught. His life-story is a story of illustrated religion. As Mahatma Gandhi said: 'The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of relig-

ion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences.'²

The Living Upanishad

Once, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna told some lay devotees who had assembled in Belur Math, 'From tomorrow I shall teach them Upanishads.' At this, Swami Premananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, remarked, 'What other Upanishads would you teach them when there is the living Upanishad? The life of the Master is the living, flaming Upanishad. ...the Master is the living demonstration of the truths of the Upanishads.'³

What is common between the Upanishads and Sri Ramakrishna's life? What makes Sri Ramakrishna a 'living demonstration of the truths of the Upanishads?' The Upanishads are a repository of the spiritual experiences of Vedic sages (*ṛṣis*) who came face to face with the Truth. They can well be likened to scientists discovering the laws and facts of the physical world. These sages were, if one can use the term, spiritual-scientists. A sage to whom the 'discovery' of a spiritual

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 6, p. 320. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

2. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), Foreword.

3. *Spiritual Talks*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), p. 81.

truth is attributed is called a *mantra-draṣṭā*, 'seer of Truth'. The collective result of the stupendous efforts of Vedic sages has come down to us as the Upanishads.

Spiritual Destiny of Man Exemplified

Vedanta is the essence of the Upanishads. Advaita Vedanta holds that Reality is the ultimate experience in human spiritual pursuit. The Upanishads say that the realization of the inherent divinity of the human being is the sole aim of human life. They point out the futility of searching for lasting happiness in the world of the senses. According to the Upanishads the goal of human beings is spiritual. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8.23.1) says: 'There is no bliss in what is finite. The Infinite alone is bliss.' And our very nature is infinite.

In Sri Ramakrishna's life, too, we find a constant emphasis on this ideal of God-realization. In fact, right from the beginning of his life we can see this attitude in him. When his elder brother Ramkumar insisted on Gadadhar's continuing his studies, the young boy had refused, saying that he was not interested in 'bread-winning' education. A biographer of Sri Ramakrishna describes this as follows: 'Having set his mind on the pure gold of God-realization, the thought of turning it towards the skill needed to accumulate the baubles of wealth and worldly honours made him shudder with revulsion.'⁴ With the passing of time, Sri Ramakrishna's desire for the Divine, or for attaining the Goal, grew a thousandfold. And he reaped a rich harvest of spiritual crop too. He gave expression to this through the songs he sang or the advice that he gave or the numerous popular maxims and anecdotes that he narrated to those who came for counsel. Why did Sri Ramakrishna, or for that matter all great mystics and scriptures, hold God-realization as the ultimate goal of human beings? The simple

reason is that human beings are not human beings but God Himself. To manifest what is hidden inside is naturally the goal.

The problem with most people is that let alone desire for God-realization, they do not even believe in God. They seem to be quite happy with the pleasures and comforts of the senses as well as social and economic security. They are quite comfortable with the observance of social customs, without ever looking to see if there is any deeper side of life. However, in spite of all this they cannot ignore the Reality or God inside them. He is always beckoning them, though amid the din of worldly noise they do not listen to His call. Worldly life will not bring any happiness. The fact remains that unless we understand and make sincere efforts to achieve the goal, life will remain unfulfilled.

Yadā carmavad-ākāśam

veṣṭayiṣyanti mānavāḥ;

Tadā devam-avijñāya

duḥkhasyānto bhaviṣyati

says the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (6.20). The meaning is, 'It is only when people are able to roll up the sky like hide that there will be an end to sorrow even without knowing God.'

The trouble with the term God-realization lies in the strange and often rudimentary concepts of God people generally hold. For the majority of people, God-realization and the disciplines involved in its pursuit sound a joyless and hazy note. But Swamiji says, 'Religion should be the most joyful thing in the world, because it is the best.'⁵ In every human being, there is a deep-rooted yearning for happiness and joy. But what prevents him from being happy and free from all that obstructs it? It is limitation. We are imprisoned in the cocoon of our limitations and shortcomings. 'We are caught, though we came to catch. We came to enjoy; we are being enjoyed. We came to rule; we are being ruled. We came to work; we are being worked. ... We want to enjoy the pleasures of life and

4. Richard Schiffman, *Sri Ramakrishna: A Prophet of the New Age* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1994), p. 13.

5. *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 7.

they eat into our vitals. We want to get everything from nature, but we find in the long run that nature takes everything from us—depletes us and casts us aside. ... Had it not been for this, life would have been all sunshine.⁶

How to come out of this complex network is a big question. Actually, what really binds us to this state of suffering is the cage of desires and egotism to which we are confined. Vedanta teachers christen this state *maya*. Bewildered by this entanglement, we rarely look into the inner bondage and keep ourselves busy with identifying and fighting against external problems. Only when we turn our search inward do we step in the right direction. The process of breaking inner bondage commences when we look for a goal in life. This goal, we soon realize, is what the mystics of all religions have all along been speaking of. God, Allah, Brahman, Atman, Father in Heaven are all different names to the same destination.

Sri Ramakrishna reiterated through his life and words the need to be fully convinced of this spiritual destination of human beings. He made God-realization or living in God-consciousness the supreme goal of life. In spite of all the bodily pain and suffering he underwent, he never prayed for release from them, though he could have easily done so with effective results. One day at Cossipore, Calcutta, a young disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Harinath (later Swami Turiyananda), asked him, 'Sir, how are you?' The Master replied, 'Oh, I am in great pain. I cannot eat anything, and there is an unbearable burning sensation in my throat.' Harinath knew that a knower of Brahman is beyond the pairs of opposites, beyond pleasure and pain. He understood that the Master was testing him; so he said to him humbly, 'Sir, whatever you may say, I see you as an infinite ocean of bliss.' At this, Sri Ramakrishna said with a smile, 'This rascal has found me out.' It is quite reminiscent of what Brother

Lawrence said: 'I know not how God will dispose of me. I am always happy. All the world suffers; and I, who deserve the severest discipline, feel joy so continual and so great that I can scarce contain them.'⁷

Universality of his Message

The Upanishads are universal in their message. The universal character lies in the fact that anyone, anywhere, irrespective of age, caste, and method of worship can know the Truth they speak of. No religion can claim a prerogative to the realization of Truth. In fact, 'the greater the science, the more varied the means of studying it,' says Swami Vivekananda.⁸ Sri Ramakrishna amply illustrated this when he practised several paths and showed that all led to the same Truth. He revalidated the Vedic truth, 'Truth is one, sages call it by different names.' Describing this superhuman accomplishment of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo wrote: 'In a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity, first driving straight to the divine realization, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realization and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experiences...'⁹ Armed with this treasure of spiritual experiences, Sri Ramakrishna exhorted not to fight over paths. Realization is the goal; so choose the best method that suits you, he would say.

7. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co, 1893), p. 20.

8. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 64.

9. *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, ed. Swami Lokeshwarananda (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1983), p. 17.

6. *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, p. 2.

Yearn for God and Renounce

It is not sufficient to know that God-realization is the aim of life and that there are many ways to it. We must translate our understanding and conviction into active striving to experience what we aim at. Sri Ramakrishna always insisted on seeking God intensely. 'Suppose,' Sri Ramakrishna said, 'a thief comes to know that there is gold kept in the next room and that only a thin wall separates him from it, do you think that he can have sleep at night? His mind will be set on how to obtain that gold.' Similar is the case of a person who has developed faith in God. Once he comes to know that there exists a Being who is the very source of all joy and strength, and that by attaining Him nothing more remains to be attained, his whole heart will be on how to know Him. Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly spoke of renunciation of lust and greed as the primary conditions for making a headway in our spiritual journey. He was a teacher of renunciation by example. In today's world, where lust and lucre reign supreme, Sri Ramakrishna's example stands like a bulwark against this, challenging and inviting people to seek true happiness through renunciation and purity.

Truth Personified

Sri Ramakrishna's purity was like that of a baby. In him 'man was all dead and only God remained.' He was an embodiment of Truth. An Upanishadic sage prayed, '*Vān me manasi pratiṣṭhitā mano me vāci pratiṣṭhitam*. May my speech be united with the mind and my mind with speech.' Sri Ramakrishna said the same thing in simple language: 'Make

your speech and intentions one.' Once, when he forgot to visit Shambhu Mallick's, he lit a hurricane lamp at night and went to his house, stepped into the portico and shouted, 'Look, here I am,' and returned.

Living the life refers to all that a person does or does not. It includes not only all his actions but also all his deliberately decided non-actions, which in turn reflect his outlook and perceptions. Living the life means living an ideal in all its minutest detail. It includes every act, big or small, known or unknown, that he undertakes. However insignificant or commonplace an action may be, the way it is done imparts a special meaning to it. The weakest link in a chain determines its total strength. Likewise, even the most unobserved, unimportant act or word or thought of a person portrays the tenor of his life. Personality and life are deeply inter-connected. In this sense, Sri Ramakrishna's life was indeed a burning example of the truths of the Upanishads in all their minutest detail.

Sri Ramakrishna lived religion. Swamiji's words best describe it:

The life of Shri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of Hindu religion. He was the object lesson of all the theoretical knowledge given in the Shastras. He showed by his life what the Rishis and Avatars wanted to teach. The books were theories, he was the realization.¹⁰

His life was his greatest message. □

10. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 52.

How to Achieve Success?

Success in any matter is achieved by diligence and effort. Try again and again if you fail. If you do not succeed even after diligent effort, know that you have not put forth the requisite amount of effort. Everything will be pliant and easy of attainment if you only really try more and more and never give up. Gradually the habit will be formed and will become part of your own nature.

—Swami Virajananda



The Disease

When the shopkeeper saw Huatse, he was excited. 'Here he comes!' he exclaimed. Customers observed Huatse. Unaware that he was the subject of their discussion, Huatse walked past the shop with absolute disinterest. Chaung, the shopkeeper, summoned him, 'Hey, Huatse! Come on!' Huatse was not enthusiastic, it appeared. When Chaung called repeatedly, he slowly turned and looked towards the shop. His face, with the thin goatee, remained expressionless. But he came. Chaung's customers were curious to see Huatse's behaviour. However, seeing his serious countenance, there was some uneasiness in these fun-lovers. Chaung said, 'Sit down, please.' A cup of tea was thrust into Huatse's hand. All looked at one another as Huatse sat with it for a long while.

'Where were you going?' asked Chaung. 'I don't know,' was the reply. A customer asked, 'Why do you behave like this? What has happened to you?' 'Happened to whom?' asked Huatse, thinking deeply as it were. 'You forgot even that? To *you*!' cried Yun. 'Oh, to me?' replied Huatse dreamily. 'Why do you behave in such a strange way? Do some work! This disease of forgetfulness which you have got will go when you work,' said a sympathetic customer. 'Let him go, poor chap. Some brain disease, and he has forgotten everything. Let us not trouble him,' said one. 'You fool! You feign forgetfulness! You are not having any problem at all,' said another. Huatse only said, 'You don't understand.' He slowly got up and walked away.

Poor Huatse, thought the people of Sung. Whoever can cure this man? He was all right, or so it appeared to be. All by himself, he would chop wood daily in the forest, sell it, bring home the money, and was quite re-

sourceful. All of a sudden he had got this disease. He had become so absent-minded that everyone was teasing him in the village. He had a wife and son to look after. If Huatse behaved in this strange manner, who would care for them? No one knew what went wrong. He simply forgot. He forgot everything. He had perhaps forgotten where his house was, and how it looked like. He perhaps did not remember his people, his own dress, or his own name even. Though some peculiar symptoms were visible, it was since the last few days that he had worsened.

Huatse's wife suffered greatly because of all her troubles, the mock sympathy of her friends, and relatives blaming her for all the problems. She would weep silently. She scolded Huatse; she begged him to work; she threatened to leave him; she devised several means to cure him of his absent-mindedness—but all went useless.

One of her real friends suggested, 'Chao dear! Don't leave things pass this way. The entire village is talking. You know Sung; you know its people. Before they create further mischief, call the physician.' Chao went to the village physician. That man was arrogant to the core. How far he knew medicines no one could gauge, but everyone knew that he understood only money. 'I shall cure your husband. That is nothing for me,' he boasted. He gave some potion. With great care, the wife fed them to her husband. She greedily saw if Huatse's dreamy eyes flickered with rays of recognition. Nothing happened. He slept deeply that day, that was all. When he woke up, she asked him, 'Do you remember me and your son?' Huatse did not answer at all. Rather, he smiled stoically: 'Why are you doing all this?' he asked. The lady threw the

potion away in anger.

The next person to attempt cure was a magician. His magic did not work either. It was days since Huatse had behaved properly. It was unbearable. Chao decided to take her husband to her father's house in the nearby village. When she sent her son to inform her father, her father sent word that he himself being very poor, it would be difficult for him to care for a mad son-in-law. Poor Chao decided to leave everything to fate.

Then came the wonderful news. There was a Confucian wise man in a nearby village. Chao heard that he was kind. She ran to him and shed tears as she narrated her husband's strange malady: 'Sir, he won't work, won't talk, won't even look! He is the only source of our family's income. What if he goes mad! Please help me.' The wise man pitied her. He said, 'Don't worry, Chao. From what you say, I understand what the difficulty is. Your husband can be cured.' Thinking for a while, he added, 'You should be ready to face certain hardships. Will you?' Huatse's wife hesitantly nodded. 'I shall torture your husband in certain ways to bring him back to his senses. You should not be overcome by it and try to save him,' warned the wise man. Chao agreed.

The wise man came to Huatse's home. He ordered, 'From today, stop feeding your husband. Bring him here.' He took Huatse into a dark cellar. Once Huatse went inside, the wise man locked it up. 'What will he eat? He is forgetful, sir, and will die!' his wife cried. 'I told you not to object to my treatment,' retorted the wise man and left. He did not return for six full days. Chao's heart was on fire, as it were. But her friend said that she must not lose faith in the wise man. On the seventh day there were feeble cries from inside: 'Chao! Chao!' Then there were knocks at the door. The wise man beamed. Chao smiled and wiped her tears. The door was opened and out came a weak Huatse. 'Why did you do this?' was his first question. 'Because you were forgetful. Because a strange thing had

overpowered you,' replied the wise man. 'Oh, Chao! Please leave me alone!' said Huatse. While Chao fed her husband, the wise man wanted to cure him further. He ordered everything to be removed from Huatse's room except for a chair. Though an extremely chilly evening, he poured cold water on Huatse and locked him up inside his room. It was terribly cold. Chao panicked. What sort of treatment is this? she thought. After hours inside, Huatse shouted, 'I shall die! Open the door and provide my clothes.' He was left to shout for a little while more and then released. When Huatse came out, he appeared enraged. He scolded his wife. 'You are merciless,' he shouted at the wise man. 'But the disease has left you!' mocked the wise man smilingly. 'I cured him! I cured him!' he shouted as people gathered. 'Don't laugh and shout, you fool of a wise man!' said Huatse in a raised tone. To the assembled joyful gathering, he said, 'Do you know what harm you all have done? It is you people who need to be cured, not I. In what a wonderful state I had been! Beyond heaven and earth, beyond pain and sorrow, beyond worries and disappointments—I was in such a state after years of effort. You disturbed me today. Now I shall again get mixed up in this world of dualities. Ah, what a loss! What a loss...' Huatse seemed very agitated. To the Confucian master, he said, 'Your texts alone are your source of knowledge. Do you know anything beyond? Have you ever tried anything beyond? You unnecessarily tortured my body extremely and dragged my mind to duality again.' The wise man seemed to understand. While he slowly walked away, Huatse sat down, thinking deeply. Even as the villagers dispersed, whispering among themselves, Chao gladly thought, 'Anyway, he is cured.'

One of the three 'pillars' of Taoism, the philosopher Lieh-tzu (also, Liehtse), uses Huatse in one of his anecdotal teachings. Lieh-tzu lived during the 5th century BCE. Unfortunately, this great philosopher himself is considered fictitious by many. □

Book Reviews

ATMABODHA OF ADI SANKARACHARYA:
By Vijay Kaskhedikar. Published by Sanskrit Bhasha Pracharini Sabha, Nagpur, 440025. 1999. Pp. xii+92. Rs.50.

Quoting the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, Swami Vivekananda often said to his disciples, 'The weak will never reach the Atman' (*Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 26). Hence, in order to be real pathfinders to God we require a strong mind and ceaseless sadhana. To teach the method of this sadhana Acharya Sankara has written the *Ātmabodha*. The very title of this book suggests the perennial interest in, and the universal value of, the search for the Self; it is a treasure for those who are struggling for absolute fulfilment. It is said that the moment Sankara thought of writing this book, he entered the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, and as such there is no benedictory verse (*maṅgalācaraṇa*) in this book. The ideas in the book are Sankara's direct experience of the absolute Reality. The title itself prescribes *ātmabodha* for earnest seekers. After all, such a lofty realization is a distant dream for those who are without austerity. Now, what is *ātmabodha*? The same Reality which is both transcendent and immanent is our *iṣṭa* also. With this conviction we should continue our sadhana as per our constitution and capacity, says Sankara.

In another context, Sankara says, 'Not *advaita vṛtti* but *advaita dīpti* is the final goal of life.' Indeed, nothing external is required to illumine the Self; it is self-revealing. Vedanta is not an intellectual possibility; it is a concrete reality. To live constantly in the consciousness of Brahman is the goal. However, Sankara, out of compassion for us, has equated the *iṣṭa* with Brahman, so that we can constantly remember the *iṣṭa* who leads us to the ultimate Reality. Thus, in traversing the spiritual path and reaching the goal, we have studied *ātmabodha* in the real sense of the term. Going through the text for reading's sake is mere academic interest. True listening to the advice of scriptures must inspire in us a spirit of renunciation. Let us, therefore, pray with all earnestness to the great Acharya that his infinite and all-embracing compassion may be there on us so that we may understand his teachings well.

The author of the book under review has given the gist of spiritual living in the light of Sankara's *Ātmabodha*. Following these principles, life can be raised to its maximum glory, and as suggested by the author himself, the pristine glory of human life

can be attained safely. This is indeed a very inspiring and illuminating publication. With its tone of familiarity and simplicity, this small book is bound to inspire both spiritual seekers and scholars of Advaita Vedanta.

Prof Amalendu Chakraborty
Former Head of the Dept of Philosophy
Presidency College, Calcutta

A SUFI GALAXY: By S.L. Gajwani. Published by H.M. Damodar, 1194 Shanti Nagar, Ulhas Nagar 421003. 2000. Pp. 316. Rs.250; \$20.95.

Here is an impressive book on Sufism. Between the years 1810, the year of Hazrat Qutab Ali Shah's birth, and 1980, the year of Sai Hari's death, there lived six Sindhi Sufis, who have been studied here. They belonged to the Jahaniyan lineage, founded in the 14th century by Syed Jalal Bukhari. The term 'Jahaniyan' derives from the epithet of Syed Jalal's grandson. Jalalud Din Hussain was popularly known as Mukhdum-i-Jahaniyan (Lord of the Mortals). Tando Jahaniyan is now in Hyderabad, Sind Province, Pakistan.

Who is a Sufi? According to the last Sufi studied in this book, a 'Sufi is he who enjoys the eternal bliss of Oneness (non-duality). The word Sufi is not a monopoly of any particular caste or creed. It is of Arabic origin and can be attributed to anybody having the qualities of a Sufi.... He who lives pure, eats pure, and is pure in thought and deed is a real Sufi, whatever be his caste or creed' (p. 281; also cf. p. 129). These Sufis never came to limelight until this book was written, feels the author. In fact, it is immature of a Sufi to display his achievements, says Qutab Ali Shah (p. 20), citing the instance of a young Sufi who passed away having declared, 'Ana-al Haq.' Qutab Ali Shah is the first wonderful saint studied in *A Sufi Galaxy*. Many of his poems (*kalaams*) have been quoted. These poems are replete with the saint's aspiration for Truth, the joy of achievement, devotion to the guru and the Ideal, etc. Qutab never cared for publicity, miracles, and so on. He never cared for wealth and riches. He hardly slept, as 'They who sleep gain nothing.' How did he rest then? 'If I spend a moment with the Lord, I feel so much bliss that my fatigue disappears and I feel fresh in my body' (p.15). Qutab Ali Shah, like others that followed him, believed in rebirth, the unity of religions (when

Hindus came to him, seeking to be converted to Islam, he strongly dissuaded them, p. 42) and the supremacy of Love. His son Hazrat Roshan Ali Shah became his disciple and succeeded him. He, too, has written many *kalaams* in praise of God, the *sadguru*, love of God, holy company, and so on. Roshan never cared for religious differences. He sang: 'Should you wish to be a yogi, search and find at [the] right place. Peep within yourself and enter the path of love. You will attain to Ram face to face there, O Roshan' (p. 59). The next saint, Sai Hadi Baksh, was Roshan Ali's son and disciple. All the above three were married by sheer force of circumstances, says the author.

Hadi Baksh has a wonderful experience to narrate. He could not give up religious distinctions in spite of effort. He was pained at this and would pray. One day he had the vision of Prophet Muhammad who gave him something for japa. To his surprise, Hadi Baksh found that it was a *Gita* verse! He practised this for many days. He later on had the vision of Sri Krishna. Krishna gave him something for japa. To his utter amazement, Hadi Baksh found that it was an *ayatu* (verse) from the Holy Koran! Since that day, he had no idea of religious distinctions at all (p. 87).

These saints apart, three others are considered: Bhai Gobind Ram Sahib, Rochaldas Sahib (who migrated to Maharashtra after the partition of India) and Dada Hari. There are numerous anecdotes narrated, some of which appear strange and quite impossible—like 'Encounter with Lord Vishnu' (p. 251), 'Meeting with a Babaji' in 1941, who is said to have left home, which was near Delhi, when Akbar ruled India! While narrating saints' lives, therefore, one has to be very cautious not to allow emotions subdue facts. But what interests spiritual aspirants is the emphasis on renunciation, love of God, devotional singing, faith, aspiration, etc. The first three saints in the book have been pictured exceedingly well indeed, and so is the long life of Rochaldas Sahib; his teachings form a separate chapter. Inspiring lives alone help us and not a hundred miraculous instances.

A Sufi Galaxy has been brought out elegantly. It has photographs of all the six Sufis as well as their *dargahs*, a beautiful Glossary, an informative Index, and a Preface from the present *Sajjadah Nashin* of Dargah Hazrat Sai Qutab Ali Shah, now in Pakistan.

This is a compelling work, thanks to Sri Gajwani's efforts. If considered seriously, *A Sufi Galaxy* will go a long way in fostering Hindu-Muslim amity.

Editor
Prabuddha Bharata

HINDU ETHICS (A CONSPECTUS): By Prof S.V. Isan. Published by Harivilas Foundation, 5-6 MMTC Colony, Nanganallur, Chennai 600061. 1999. Pp. viii+61. Rs.30.

Hindu Ethics makes a brief but excellent study of ethics, studying several Hindu scriptures. The book is an attempt to draw the interest of the youth towards a deeper study of the ethical principles and moral standards as laid down in our tradition. Harivilas Foundation is a recently established trust whose aim is to 'assist propagation of moral spiritual values and the pursuit of excellence' through pamphlets, books, etc.

Everyone wants to be happy. Herein lies the necessity of learning to live in peace, and maintaining a harmonious relation with the surroundings. Ethics is the word of concern here. The book discusses its origin and evolution. In his Introduction, Sri M.K. Srinivasan expresses grave concern about the fast eroding moral standards and its effect on present-day society. Sri T.B. Nagarajan has written a lucid Foreword, highlighting the tone of the book. The book itself consists of nine chapters. The first three establish the root of ethics in the Vedas. The author quotes and analyses how the Upanishads show the way to subordinate personal ends to social ones. Relevant quotations from the Upanishads have demonstrated how ethics should control our work. Dharma also means ethical codes. This always has social implications according to our scriptures.

The next three chapters deal with ethics in the *Manusmriti* and the two great epics in particular. Both epics consider assigned duties higher than personal relationships. While discussing ethics according to the *Gita*, the author recognizes the tone of harmony among the different ideals of life. Prof Isan finds the basic spirit of Hindu philosophy as the guiding force behind the moral standards in the six systems of Indian philosophy, where the training of the will gets importance. Prof Isan finds ethics 'invariably connected with religion and metaphysics in Hinduism.' We are not actually aware of the golden treasures in our heritage. This book, a conspectus, reminds us once again of the Vedic texts, other scriptures, as well as modern thinkers within our tradition. It is a small book but rich in content, and passes the thread over to the reader to weave his or her own cloth in the realm of our heritage and culture.

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News and Reports

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ACTIVITIES DURING 1998-99

What follows is a brief review of the work accomplished by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission during the financial year 1998-99. Facts and figures are culled from the Report of the Governing Body presented at the Mission's 90th Annual General Meeting held on 19 December 1999.

Among the important events of the year, the conferring of the Gandhi Peace Prize on the Ramakrishna Mission by the President of India deserves special mention (for a detailed report please see *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1999). During 1998-99 new mobile medical units were started by our Allahabad, Karimganj, New Delhi, Ranchi (both Morabadi and TB Sanatorium) centres. The educational complex at the Mission's Port Blair centre was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India.

The Mission made considerable progress in its efforts to acquire the ancestral property of Swami Vivekananda. The place was completely vacated after providing alternative accommodation and monetary compensation to all the occupants. Restoration work was begun on a massive scale with substantial assistance from the state and central governments.

New temples were dedicated in Kishanpur and Malda, and foundation-stone was laid for one in Pune. The Vivekananda Ashrama in Ulsoor, which was a sub-centre of the Bangalore Math, was converted into a full-fledged centre. Outside India, the Vivekananda Retreat at Ridgely was formally inaugurated, and groundbreaking ceremony for an ashram building and shrine was performed at the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington, DC. A new Math centre also came into being in Sao Paulo.

In 1998-99 the Mission had 5 degree colleges, 4 teachers' training colleges, 5 junior basic training institutes, 11 higher secondary schools, 30 secondary schools, 127 other schools of different grades, 4 polytechnics, 6 junior technical and industrial schools, 85 hostels and students' homes, 5 orphanages, 3 agricultural institutes, 2 language schools, a computer centre, a blind academy, 5 rural development training institutes, and 315 non-formal-education centres, night schools and the like. The Mission spent Rs.560.8 million on educational work. The Math centres operated a BEd college, a Sanskrit college, a language school and a total of 39 schools, students' homes, etc. The students of our educational institutions preserved the Mission's established reputation for excellent performance. The following table highlights some of their achievements.

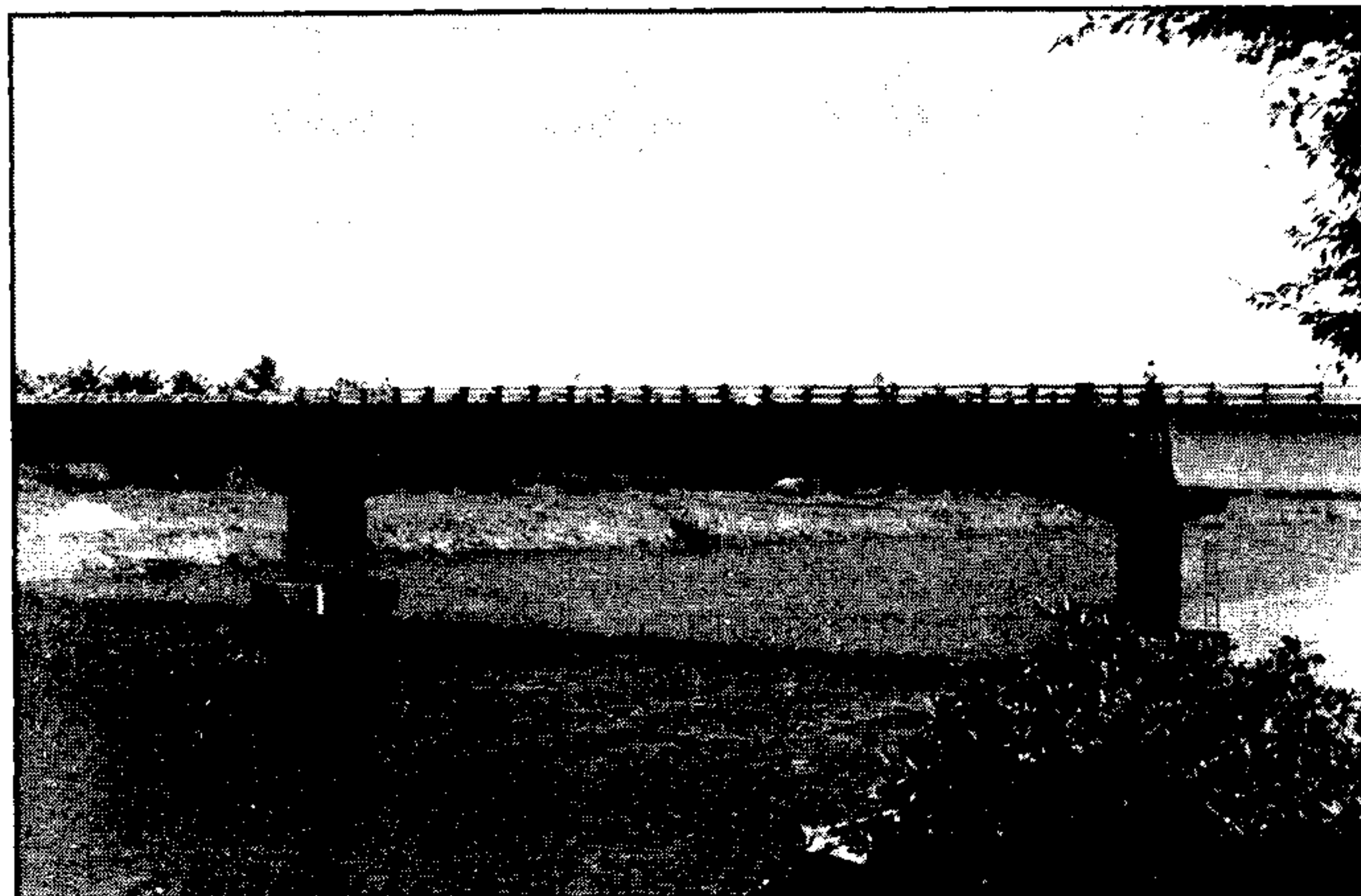
BOARD/UNIVERSITY	EXAMINATION (1998)	POSITION(S) OBTAINED
Central Board	Secondary	1 in Allahabad Zone
West Bengal Board	Madhyamik Higher Secondary	3, 6 and 8 7
Calcutta University	BSc (Hons) Chemistry	1, 4, 5 and 7
	BSc (Hons) Mathematics	1, 8 and 9
	BSc (Hons) Physics	2, 4, 5 and 9
	BSc (Hons) Statistics	8
Madras University	BSc Chemistry	1
	MA Philosophy	2
	MA Sanskrit	2
	MSc Botany	7
	MSc Physics	5
Mysore University	BEd	1, 2 and 7

As usual, a few of them also bagged prizes and prestigious awards at various state- and national-level competitions.

During the year under review, the Mission had 9 hospitals with 1720 beds, 2 old age homes, 73 dispensaries and 31 mobile medical units. It also ran 4 nurses' training centres and a medical institute for postgraduate studies. It spent Rs.194.8 million under this head. The Math had 5 hospitals with 327 beds, an old age home, 25 dispensaries, 5 mobile medical units and a nurses' training centre.

In the area of relief and rehabilitation, the Mission conducted extensive programmes in several parts

of India and Bangladesh spending about Rs.39.7 million. In addition to this, relief articles worth Rs.2.1 million were distributed across 578 villages. The Mission also undertook the major responsibility of laying a bridge across the Vrudha Gautami Estuary in Andhra Pradesh. [It achieved a new milestone in this field when it successfully completed the task in December 1999. The bridge, now called 'Vivekananda Bridge' (see picture), was inaugurated on 12 January 2000 by the Chief



Minister of Andhra Pradesh.] On its part, the Math covered 57 villages and spent Rs.0.95 million, apart from distributing relief articles worth Rs.0.38 million.

Both the Headquarters and the branch centres did considerable welfare work by providing scholarships and stipends to a large number of students, medical aid to poor patients and financial assistance to aged and destitute people. In all a sum of Rs.18.4 million was disbursed under this head.

Through a large number of libraries and reading-rooms; classes, lectures and seminars; film shows, exhibitions and celebrations, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission reached the people at large and spread spiritual and cultural ideas among the general public. The publications of the Ramakrishna Order inspired thousands of people to accept higher values of life.

Excluding the Headquarters at Belur Math, the Ramakrishna Mission had, as of 31 March 1999, 84 branch centres: 70 in India, 8 in Bangladesh, and 6 spread over various parts of the world. As of the same date, the Ramakrishna Math had 80 branches in India and abroad. The following table will give readers a fair idea of the major activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission during 1998-99.

NATURE OF ACTIVITY	NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS	NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES	AMOUNT SPENT (IN RS MILLIONS)
Educational Work	Schools, Colleges, etc 356	117,807	594.2
	Non-formal, Adult Education/ Night Schools 301	22,016	
Medical Service	Hospitals 14	In-pat. 73,530	225.4
	Dispensaries 135	Out-pat. 5,847,366	
	Old Age Homes 3	Inmates 97	
Relief and Rehabilitation		500,000 (approx)	50.0

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